

South Australia Police

Domestic Abuse Strategy

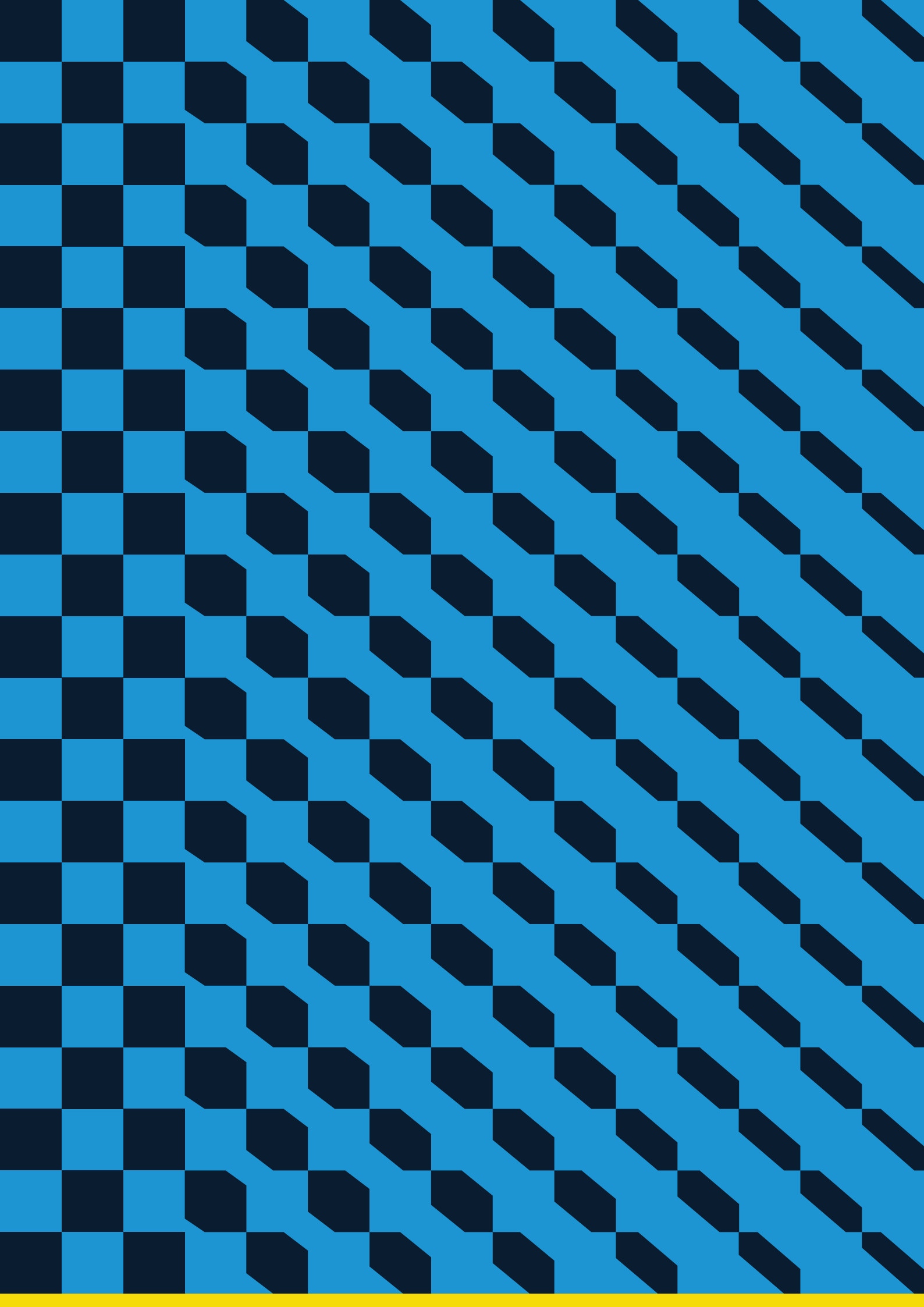
2025 - 2026



SOUTH AUSTRALIA POLICE
SAFER COMMUNITIES




Government of
South Australia



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A woman with long brown hair is covering her face with her hands, suggesting distress or shame. In the foreground, a large, open hand is held up, palm facing forward, with red-painted fingernails. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

**Domestic abuse
in any form is
unacceptable.**

Commissioner's message



Grant Stevens
Commissioner of Police
South Australia Police

Domestic abuse is a complex and insidious problem affecting people across all demographics in their private lives and workplaces. It causes generational damage to victim-survivors and their children who suffer ongoing fear, emotional trauma and a loss of personal autonomy. South Australia Police (SAPOL) is committed to reducing the prevalence of domestic abuse in our community and the harm caused to victim-survivors and their families.

Our highest priority is the protection and ongoing safety of victim-survivors and their children and holding the perpetrator accountable.

It has been a decade since the introduction of the Multi Agency Protection Service in South Australia and through this initiative we have built strong relationships and developed integrated responses essential to progressing further change within our community. SAPOL's participation in two metropolitan multi-agency facilities and one regional facility also provides victim-survivors and their children with a collaborative response to better meet their needs. But we still have more work to do.

SAPOL acknowledges the gendered nature of domestic abuse and the necessity to engage with community and other service providers to better understand how we can work together to complement our service delivery. We are working to provide greater accessibility to our services to help prevent incidents of domestic abuse and provide a timely and effective response when a situation escalates to crisis and violence. We are collaborating with government in relation to improving legislation to better reflect the community's need for protection around coercive control and stalking. The key to achieving our goals is managing police resources to ensure sufficient focus on prevention, early intervention and our response in times of crisis, including victim-survivor support, investigations and ultimately holding perpetrators to account in the criminal justice system.

This strategy sets out the steps we must take to achieve the aim of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032* of ending gender-based violence in one generation. It is our roadmap for future responses to domestic abuse and reflects our commitment to building safer communities.

Introduction

In South Australia, the *Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse) Act 2009* provides a legislative definition of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is an act of abuse by one person to another with whom they are, or have been, in a relationship.

Domestic abuse is one of the largest drivers of demand for police services in South Australia. The complexity of these events, and the time taken to effectively manage them, is increasing. This demand is not unique to South Australia and the issue has seen the emergence of local, state and national bodies to tackle domestic abuse nationwide. These include the appointment of the first Federal Government Commissioner for Family and Sexual Abuse as well as the commencement on 1 July 2024 of the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in South Australia.

Impact on policing

- Domestic abuse related events reported to SAPOL account for 17.8% of total police response time.
- 70% increase in domestic abuse offence occurrences between 2018/19 and 2023/24.
- 80.4% increase in police time on event for domestic abuse events between 2018/19 and 2023/24.

8—Meaning of abuse—domestic and non-domestic

- (1) **Abuse** may take many forms including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or economic abuse.
- (2) An act is **an act** of abuse against a person if it results in or is intended to result in—
 - (a) physical injury;
 - (b) emotional or psychological harm; or
 - (c) an unreasonable and non-consensual denial of financial, social or personal autonomy;or
 - (d) damage to property in the ownership or possession of the person or used or otherwise enjoyed by the person.

Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse Act) 2009

Domestic abuse may involve overt or subtle exploitation of power imbalances and may consist of an isolated incident or a pattern of behaviour. Within a relationship where domestic abuse exists, there will be:

- unequal power/privilege of the perpetrator over the victim.
- control exerted by the perpetrator.
- fear of consequences by the victim.

National reflections

The SAPOL Domestic Abuse Strategy aims to reflect the principles and priority responses recommended at State and Commonwealth levels.

The *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032* reflects a multi-sectoral approach and outlines a strategy to achieve the plan of ending gender-based violence in one generation, across four domains: prevention; early intervention; response; and recovery and healing. Accompanying the National Plan is the *First Action Plan 2023-2027* which provides a roadmap for the first five years recommending areas of focus to achieve the vision of the National Plan.

In addition, the national *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025* has been developed by the Commonwealth Government in recognition of the disproportionately high rates of family, domestic and sexual violence experienced by First Nations women. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan* focuses on initiatives which address the current safety needs in a culturally informed way of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and families, as well as lay a foundation for longer-term structural change, and will operate alongside the *First Action Plan 2023-2027*.

The *Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Commission Strategic Plan 2023-26* has the core function of promoting and supporting the achievement of the objectives of the National Plan and holding governments accountable to it. The Commission has the functions of:

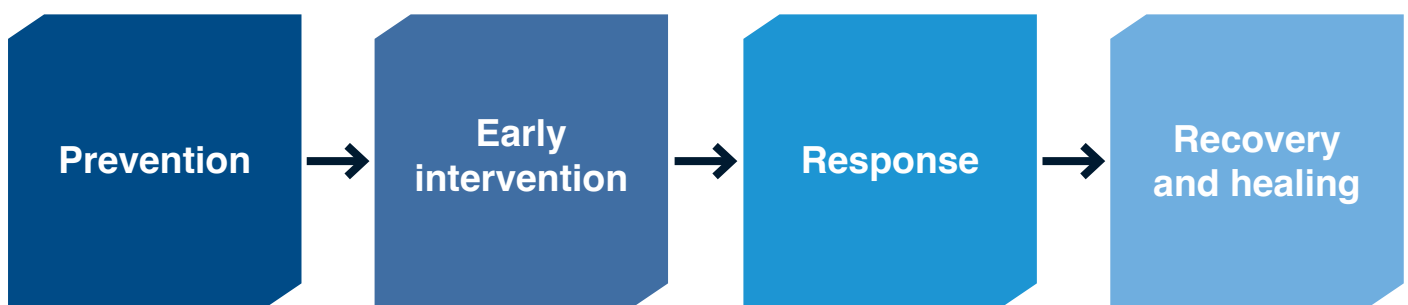
- providing strategic policy advice to government
- promoting and enhancing coordination across the Australian state and territory governments and the not-for-profit and private sectors
- promoting coordinated and consistent monitoring and evaluation frameworks
- developing and maintaining a supportive and structured approach to victim-survivor engagement
- informing priorities for policy, research and data collection and promoting the objectives of the National Plan across all parts of Australian society.

The Australian New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) delivers cross-jurisdictional strategy and capability development and policy instruments, education and training products, and workshops to police services. ANZPAA is currently engaged in developing a consistent domestic abuse training capability across all Australian and New Zealand policing jurisdictions.

SAPOL's commitment

Through our Domestic Abuse Policing Model, SAPOL provides a response to domestic abuse which:

- supports prevention of abuse
- works with victim-survivors and perpetrators to intervene early and provide support to prevent further abuse
- protects victim-survivors and their children and holds offenders accountable
- engages in collaborative work with other agencies to aid recovery and healing.



Prevention is about stopping violence before it begins. This involves changing the social and cultural norms that support violence occurring. Police should reiterate these values in their dealings with the community and by modelling equitable and respectful behaviour in the workplace.

Early intervention targets individuals who demonstrate early signs of abuse, including controlling behaviours, with the aim of preventing those behaviours from escalating into violence. Police can identify these types of behaviours in their interactions with families, provide advice and link these families to services who can support behaviour change.

Response involves providing immediate safety to victim-survivors and their children and investigating incidents of domestic abuse. Police provide a response that is accessible, innovative and efficient in recognising and managing the unique needs and circumstances of each domestic abuse victim-survivor and their children. A criminal justice response holds an offender accountable for their violence and supports the community messaging that domestic abuse is unacceptable.



Recovery and healing promotes conducting investigations with a trauma-informed lens to minimise re-traumatisation of victim-survivors. It involves collaboration between police and other services to enable effective support thereby reducing fragmentation and duplication of services and achieving better outcomes in relation to ongoing safety, support and recovery of victim-survivors and their families.

SAPOL is committed to the following principles:

- Leading in the community to challenge gender inequality and social norms that support violence against women and their children.
- Intervening at the earliest opportunity to prevent the escalation of violence and minimise further harm.
- Providing integrated responses by police, key public sector agencies, non-government organisations and the broader community.
- Supporting victim-survivors in a manner which prioritises their safety while respecting their right to make choices for themselves wherever possible.
- Holding perpetrators accountable for their behaviour in a manner which is commensurate with their offending and the level of risk to the victim-survivor.
- Educating and training the workforce in the understanding of relevant legislation, policy and procedures.

Our model

SAPOL has been actively working to enhance its role in responding to domestic abuse in the community since the introduction of the original SAPOL Domestic Violence Strategy in 2005. A number of structures, policies and initiatives exist to support an effective police response to domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Portfolio Governance Committee, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner, provides executive oversight of SAPOL's commitment, approach and response to domestic abuse.

The Family and Domestic Violence Section supports governance, accountability, training and consistency in service delivery to victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

The SAPOL Domestic Abuse Policing Model – the philosophy, practices and procedures contained in General Order, **Domestic abuse** – provides guidance in procedures for police managing domestic abuse investigations to ensure support is provided to victim-survivors and their families in a consistent manner.

Along with a trained frontline response, domestic abuse specialist staff are located in each District and Local Service Area and provide an expert follow-up response in risk review and the investigation of domestic abuse incidents, including a strong role in integrated responses to support victim-survivors. Domestic abuse specialist staff complete an eight-hour online induction course (Foundation Training Program) which provides a base level

of knowledge for staff commencing in the role, and a five-day face-to-face course (Domestic Violence Investigator's Course) designed to enhance knowledge and skills including investigative techniques and an understanding of collaborative approaches.

The Multi Agency Protection Service (MAPS) is an interagency information sharing model led by SAPOL which aims to reduce the incidence or impact of domestic abuse in the community by reviewing and sharing information and issuing actions to participating agencies.

The Family Safety Framework (FSF) provides a strategic and proactive way for government and non-government agencies to work together to address domestic abuse in South Australia for those families most at risk of violence. A key component of the FSF is the Family Safety Meeting, chaired by SAPOL, which is attended by agencies and services working with high-risk victim-survivors of domestic abuse. Family Safety Meetings provide an opportunity to share real time information and to develop collaborative responses.

Prosecution Services Branch have dedicated prosecutors who handle domestic abuse matters at metropolitan courts and some regional courts. All prosecutors have a sound understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse. This assists in their management of these matters including those involving intervention orders.

Strategic Priority One:

Prevention

Objective

To build on the culture in SAPOL which understands that domestic abuse in any form is unacceptable and which challenges the attitudes and behaviours that allow domestic abuse to occur.

Strategies

1. Model behaviours and attitudes which support respectful treatment of women and challenge gender inequality bias.
2. Promote an understanding in the community of the services provided by police in relation to domestic abuse for victims and perpetrators, options available and support services provided by our partnership agencies.
3. Encourage the reporting of domestic abuse by providing trauma-informed, professional, knowledgeable and consistent responses from the first point of police contact.
4. Participate in information sharing that focuses on reducing risk and creating safety for victim-survivors of domestic abuse.
5. Establish links with First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and LGBTQIA+ communities, the elderly and those living with a disability, and the services supporting these vulnerable groups, to ensure their needs are understood and met.
6. Maintain organisational White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation.

Strategic Priority Two:

Early intervention

Objective

Engage with external service providers to provide an integrated response to victim-survivors and their children to support their safety and wellbeing, including linking a perpetrator to appropriate support services to minimise the risk of re-offending.

Strategies

1. Demonstrate leadership in joint responses with a sound understanding of the roles, responsibilities and limitations of partner agencies.
2. Continued participation with the Multi Agency Protection Service and the Family Safety Framework to ensure an effective joint response to high-risk victim-survivors.
3. Share information across agencies and jurisdictional boundaries to support victim-survivor safety and perpetrator accountability.
4. Refer high risk recidivist perpetrators to the South Australian Offender Management Program (OMP) for consideration of inclusion to provide individualised responses to reduce offending.
5. Participate in governance arrangements relating to State and Commonwealth Government initiatives.

Strategic Priority Three:

Response

Objective

To undertake an effective response and investigation of domestic abuse incidents which minimises further harm to victim-survivors, maximises their safety and holds a perpetrator accountable for their behaviour and discourages recidivism.

Strategies

1. Employ an inquisitive and thorough approach to all investigations to ensure all evidence is gathered to enhance prosecution outcomes and victim-survivor safety.
2. Utilise the domestic abuse risk assessment effectively to inform the response to a victim-survivor.
3. Empower victim-survivors to make informed choices where it is safe to do so.
4. Recognise primary and secondary victims of domestic abuse and ensure they receive a response beyond that provided to the primary victim-survivor, which ensures the impact of the harm to them is minimised.
5. Maintain perpetrator accountability in a way which is commensurate with the offending and the assessed risk level of the victim-survivor and any involved children.
6. Utilise bail and intervention orders to enhance victim-survivor safety in accordance with legislation and policy.
7. Ensure policing responses to domestic abuse meets the needs of First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse and vulnerable communities.
8. Share information with respect to safety of children and vulnerable adults in line with authorities and legislation.

Strategic Priority Four:

Recovery and healing

Objective

To ensure investigations are undertaken with a trauma-informed approach providing victim-survivors with support and focussing on their safety from the initial police intervention. The recognition that holistic recovery extends beyond the scope of law enforcement and requires effective collaboration and support of victim-survivors throughout the judicial process and beyond.

Strategies

1. Ensure investigations are conducted sensitively and respectfully to minimise re-traumatisation of victim-survivors.
2. Work collaboratively with other government, non-government agencies and the community to participate in, and further develop, coordinated approaches to domestic abuse.
3. Support a victim-survivor's ongoing needs through collaboration with, and referral to, service providers.
4. Ensure a coordinated and holistic response to victim-survivor needs through the application of safety planning processes.
5. Ensure that a victim-survivor is informed and empowered during the investigation process and judicial proceedings.

Strategic Priority Five:

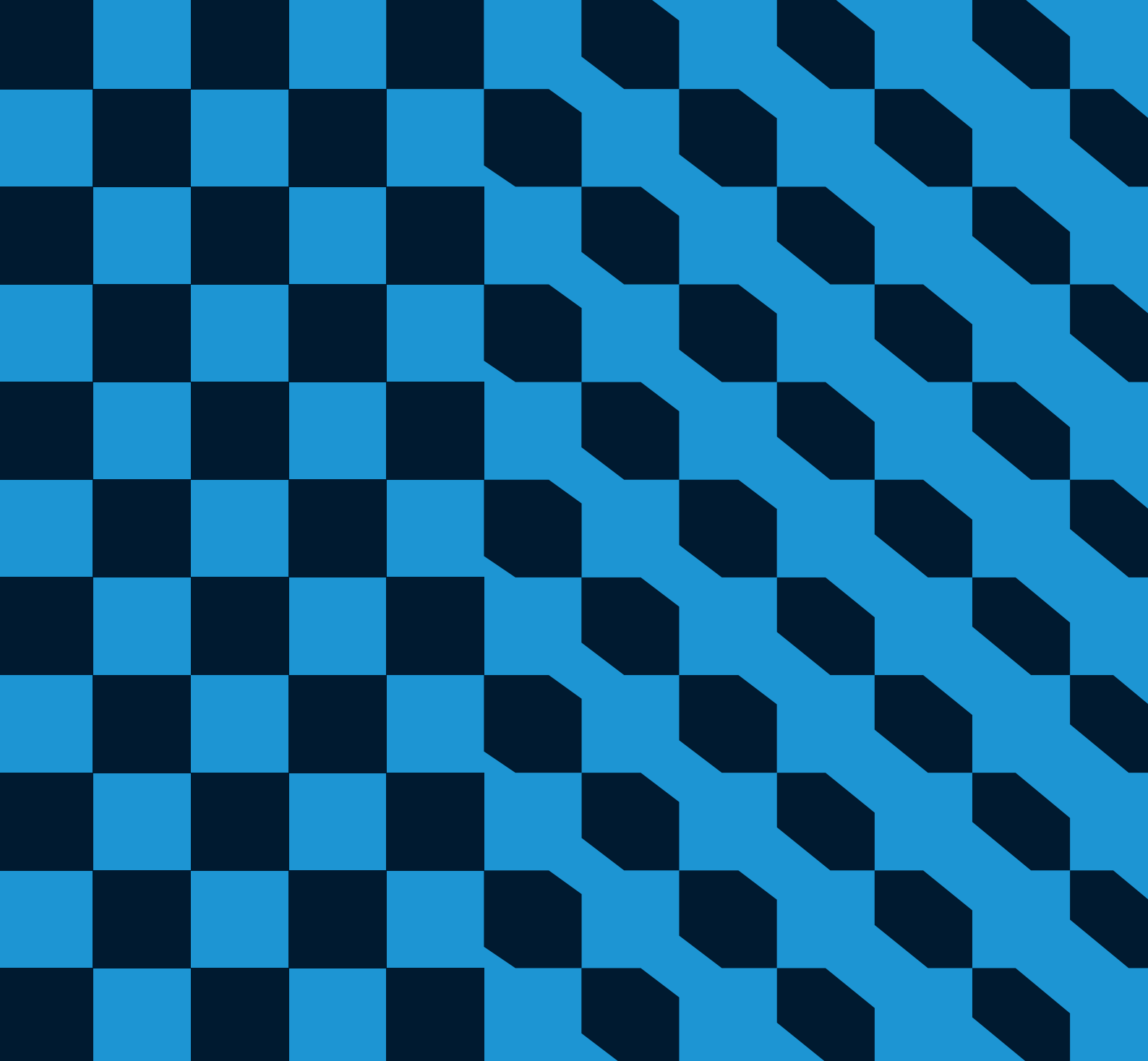
Education, training and service delivery

Objective

To ensure SAPOL staff are equipped with contemporary knowledge, training and education required to meet the expected service delivery standards when responding to domestic abuse.

Strategies

1. Support the development and availability of SAPOL specialist training courses in domestic abuse and child protection commensurate with social and legislative circumstances.
2. Increase understanding of the dynamics associated with domestic abuse and the importance of providing a response to victim-survivors that meets their individual circumstances and needs, ensuring their safety as a priority.
3. Ensure policies and procedures in relation to the investigation, management and prosecution of domestic abuse remain responsive to new research, experiences, practices, government policy and legislation.
4. Foster a culture that values equity and diversity, which is reflected both within the workplace and in our dealings with our partner agencies and the community, to support the elimination of violence against women and children.
5. Ensure all SAPOL employees are aware of appropriate local, state and national support agencies that assist domestic abuse victim-survivors, their children and perpetrators.
6. Ensure holistic monitoring, review and evaluation of domestic abuse operations within SAPOL by Family and Domestic Violence Section.
7. Ensure accountability of SAPOL staff to adhere to the required training, policy and procedures through relevant audit processes.



References

- ANZPAA Strategy 2020-2025
- General Order, **Domestic abuse (South Australia Police)**
- *Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Commission Strategic Plan 2023-26*
- Family Safety Framework
- *Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse) Act 2009*
- *National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children 2022-2032*

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Service Integrity Leadership Collaboration Courage Respect