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## Media Release

### Call for prevention to be at the centre of coercive control solutions following National Summit

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Several Victorian organisations and advocates have united to call for prevention to be at the heart of all national coercive control solutions.

“We all have a right to safety, which is why prevention can no longer be an afterthought when it comes to dealing with coercive control,” said Respect Victoria Acting CEO Amy Prendergast.

“By addressing the attitudes and behaviours that sit behind coercive control – including sexism, ableism, homophobia and colonialism – we can ultimately prevent family violence and violence against women,” said Ms Prendergast.

Coercive control was on the agenda of the National Summit on Women’s Safety last week, with a strong focus on legislation change.

Domestic Violence Victoria and the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria CEO Tania Farha said that the next National Plan must provide the foundation for a consistent approach to primary prevention across the country.

“We have to shift the norms, attitudes and behaviours behind coercive control and this requires broad sweeping structural and cultural change,” said Ms Farha.

Djirra CEO Antoinette Braybrook said that the conversation around coercive control must be broadened beyond criminalisation, with prevention and early intervention as the solution.

“Instead of putting money into the criminal justice system, invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled, self-determined solutions that we know work for our women, families and communities,” said Ms Braybrook.

Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health advocates for and with migrant and refugee women. Executive Director Dr Adele Murdolo said that prevention is the key to creating real and lasting change.

“Migrant and refugee women and their communities are already leading the way in preventing violence, and it’s time to listen and learn from them,” said Dr Murdolo. “Whole of community and tailored approaches are needed, to ensure that we address the structural inequalities that enable violence against migrant and refugee women.”

Advocate and Deputy Chair of the Victim Survivor Advisory Council Geraldine Bilston said that regardless of legislation change, without action on prevention women will remain at risk.

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“It’s no longer good enough to keep talking about ending family violence – we must take action,” said Ms Bilston. “We must see a national commitment to changing the societal norms and structures that allow coercive control and other forms of violence to occur.”

Women’s Information Referral Service (WIRE) CEO Julie Kun said that every day, their staff speak to callers experiencing coercive control and have seen the devastating impact on victim-survivors.

“Preventing and eliminating abusive and destructive behaviours of coercive control is not just a legal matter—we need targeted education programs to shift harmful attitudes and enhance understanding of respectful relationships,” said Ms Kun.

No to Violence CEO Jacqui Watt said that unless we stop violence at the start and prevent all forms of family violence, this devastating cycle will continue.

“It’s important we remember that all family and domestic violence is coercive control,” said Ms Watt. “Raising awareness of coercive control means giving our community the skills they need to recognise non-physical forms of family violence, and the tools they need to safely do something about it.”

“The most important lever we have to prevent coercive control is cultural change,” said Ms Prendergast. “That’s why all solutions going forward, including the National Plan, must place a strong investment in prevention to stop violence before it starts.”

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