



## YSAS Response to National Family Violence Crisis

**Date:** 6.5.24

The Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) stands alongside and acknowledges the strengths, agency, and resilience of victim-survivors of family violence. Holding a vision of "A community where all young people are valued, included and have every opportunity to thrive", YSAS recognises the significant immediate and ongoing impacts of family violence on the lives of young people, their families, and communities.

The continuing national family violence crisis in Australia has resulted in devastating impacts such as the loss of life and safety of adults, children, and young people victim-survivors. Family violence is a gendered issue that disproportionately impacts women and children, including young women.

YSAS recognises that young people are a distinct social cohort who require age and developmentally-sensitive responses to family and intimate partner violence. Young people's experiences are complex; they may be both victim-survivors and/or users of family violence, youth intimate partner violence and/or adolescent violence in the home. Therefore, young people require unique youth-focused approaches that are adaptable to their age, development, lives, families, and communities.

Experiences and/or use of family and intimate partner violence are evident in the lives of young people accessing YSAS services. In recognition of this need, YSAS has undertaken a large body of workforce capacity building over the last decade to establish and strengthen the organisation's ability to provide direct support, intervention, and responses to young people experiencing and/or using family and intimate partner violence.

YSAS recognises the need for youth-focused early interventions targeted to those who are using violence and harm. Such approaches can engage youth, particularly young men, to create changes in their life trajectories that allow respect, safety, and relationships free from the use of abuse, violence, power, and control. This is particularly evident in the work of the Youth Support Service (YSS) crime prevention and early intervention program, which uses a resilience-based outreach model to provide individualised support to young people, their families, and communities. It is with this approach that the YSS program regularly and effectively engages youth victim-survivors and/or users of violence to establish safety and meaningful change. YSAS also continues to participate in a variety of pilot projects, including the Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Project (YCPEIP), in partnership with a variety of youth, community, and legal agencies with the goals of establishing cautioning and pre-court diversion, intervention and support to prevent broader youth crime, in ways which are culturally appropriate and safe.

YSAS also recognises the complex intersections between family and intimate partner violence, youth, and substance use. Young people may use drugs and alcohol as ways of



coping with the trauma, abuse, and harm of family and intimate partner violence. Conversely, drugs and alcohol can also be weaponised as forms of power, control, and abuse by those who use intimate partner violence in a dynamic recognised as *substance use coercion*. YSAS' internally driven work to date in identifying and understanding *substance use coercion* has identified the immediate severe and ongoing impacts of this issue on young people's alcohol and other drug (AoD) use, harm minimisation, treatment pathways, wellbeing, and health.

In the face of the continuing national family violence crisis, YSAS calls for:

1. Recognition that young people require support, intervention and family violence responses that are different to adults and sensitive to the age, developmental needs, and unique contexts of youth.
2. Continued and further investment in services that can provide youth-focused support and intervention to young people who experience and/or use family and intimate partner violence.
3. The establishment of youth-focused diversion programs that are specific to the intervention needs of young people using family and intimate partner violence, and in particular young men.
4. Investment in research at YSAS to further understand the issue of *substance use coercion* from a youth perspective. This includes identifying the dynamics and tactics of this abuse, alongside establishing effective intervention strategies that can be adopted across the broader youth and youth AoD sector.
5. Continued investment in family violence capacity building in the youth-specific service systems (AoD, mental health, homelessness, etc.) to ensure service providers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources to meet the needs of young people about family and intimate partner violence.

YSAS recognises the need for a whole-of-society and systemic approach to ending family violence and the important role that youth-specific service systems can play in this work.

YSAS has demonstrated and remains committed to the work to prevent and end family violence. YSAS advocates for the rights of young people to have access to youth-focused interventions, supports, systems and services that are intersectional, sensitive to age and development and enable life trajectories of respect, safety, dignity, equality, and freedom from violence.