



30 July 2021

By email : [Nationalplanfeedback@dss.gov.au](mailto:Nationalplanfeedback@dss.gov.au)

Dear Madam/Sir

## Developing the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA ANZ) represents more than 128,000 financial professionals, supporting them to make a difference to the businesses, organisations and communities in which they work and live. Chartered Accountants are known as Difference Makers. The depth and breadth of their expertise helps them to see the big picture and chart the best course of action.

### CA ANZ values equal opportunity

CA ANZ welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children. The values of equality, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of all we do at CA ANZ – it is ingrained in our workplace values, our advocacy efforts and in the ethical code that each and every one of our members hold very dear.

Public trust in the profession rests on a combination of visible commitment to ethics and integrity, high levels of ongoing education, accountability via professional discipline, and commitment to act in the public interest. At their heart, professions offer a unique trinity of expertise, ethics and integrity.

As a global professional body, we aspire to do more than represent members and the community as it is today, we also strive to represent what we could be - a society free of prejudice and racism, where difference is celebrated and valued, and everyone has equal opportunities.

### Financial abuse is underestimated

Financial abuse is particularly insidious as it is deliberately intended to strip women of their independence, confidence and ability to manage their personal financial situation.

There are no reliable estimates of the prevalence of either economic or financial abuse, in part because of the wide range of behaviours involved in coercive control, and lack of standard definition or system for data capture. Financial abuse has been estimated to occur among 80 to 90 percent of women who seek support for domestic and family violence. Lack of economic security and financial resources has been cited as the primary reason women return to abusive relationships.

### Specialist resources dealing with financial abuse are needed

While there is a great deal of information available for women managing financial hardship on the internet, it is not centralised or easy to find, nor is it specifically tailored for women facing domestic violence and financial abuse.

Feedback from domestic violence survivors and support sector suggests that information needs to be available in one easily accessible place and presented in “bite sized” chunks which are easy to find, simple to understand and catalogued according to what and when they are likely to be needed. This is particularly important when a person is looking for information at a time of crisis.

There is a clear need for tailored financial education, integrated with other information that provides guidance and support for women to help them transition from being victims of domestic violence and financial abuse to being independent, empowered and financially resilient. There are resources in the market that are proven and effective. Your Toolkit, detailed below, is one such resource that has been developed for these situations. Promotion and support for these resources in the recommendations of this inquiry would be an important initial step.

### Your Toolkit – a resource to help those financially abused

CA ANZ has partnered with the Women at Risk committee of Financial Toolbox Inc<sup>1</sup>, who developed ‘[Your Toolkit](#)’ as a comprehensive resource. Many CA ANZ members in Perth, WA, volunteered their time to help develop the web-based resource, which contains information to assist women and children facing domestic violence and financial abuse transition to becoming independent, empowered and financially resilient.

The value of this resource has been recognised by many key stakeholders including:

- ASIC which has included it on their [Financial Capability website](#) and on their Financial Capability Community of Practice list.
- A number of industry participants (including 1800 Respect, WACOSS, HeadSpace, Allambee, Wanslea, Womens Health and Family Services) which are promoting Your Toolkit through their networks.
- The peak body the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing (formerly WA Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence) has sent a link to Your Toolkit to all of their members and has put a link on their website.
- Legal Aid WA which has included Your Toolkit in their Family Violence Law Help website as well as on their Legal Aid WA site;
- Shelter WA has been putting Your Toolkit in their news circulation list and provided information about the Your Toolkit in their newsletter; and
- [Financial Counselling network](#) has included a presentation about Your Toolkit in their recent information for members session and are also talking to CA ANZ and Financial Toolbox Inc about future initiatives involving Your Toolkit.
- WA Department of Communities, WA Department of Education, WA Police refer clients and key stakeholders to Your Toolkit.

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<sup>1</sup> This organisation provides financial education and other critical, practical information for women at risk of, or facing, domestic violence and financial abuse to help them transition to being independent, empowered and financially resilient.

As well as providing a valuable stand-alone tool, Your Toolkit is being used to contribute to financial education workshops being delivered in women's refuges across WA. The program is being undertaken as part of the Economic Empowerment Project: a collaboration between Financial Toolbox, Financial Counsellors' Association of WA (who are spear-heading the project), the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing, Curtin University (School of Social Work), women's refuges and Department of Communities.

### More needs to be done

The difference that Your Toolkit has made with its very limited funding and significant pro bono support by CA ANZ members and others is momentous. CA ANZ and Financial Toolbox Inc. are very proud of what has been achieved so far. But recognise that more needs to be done.

Funding and promotion of resources such as Your Toolkit is needed. For example, with additional funding, the following developments could be made to Your Toolkit to further its reach and effectiveness:

- Adapting the content and expanding the relevance of Your Toolkit to meet the needs of women right across Australia. Whilst most of the information provided is relevant to all Australian women, around 30 per cent is specific to Western Australian legal and cultural context. However research is showing that women all across Australia are using the resource, particularly since the start of the COVID pandemic. We have begun work to update the website and expand the content to meet a national need, and require further support and funding to continue this work.
- Create culturally and linguistically diverse translation or read out facilities to meet the needs of women from multicultural backgrounds.
- Aboriginal language translation, graphical representation and cultural adaption, developed in consultation with Indigenous communities, to meet the needs of Aboriginal women.

There is a clear and urgent need for easy-to-access information that provides guidance and support to help women transition from being victims of domestic violence and financial abuse to being independent, empowered and financially resilient. Education on personal finances and available support services is vital to increase women's financial resilience and the ability of women and children to leave abusive relationships, and to not be coerced into returning into these situations. This is all available on a resource like Your Toolkit, and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand enthusiastically support this invaluable initiative.

Should you have any queries please contact me at [Ainslie.vanOnselen@charteredaccountantsanz.com](mailto:Ainslie.vanOnselen@charteredaccountantsanz.com).

Yours faithfully



Ainslie van Onselen  
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