

# Executive summary

**The *Thinking Futures: Psychology's role in transforming women and girls' psychological health* report, developed by the Australian Psychological Society (APS), provides a comprehensive analysis of the psychological health and safety challenges faced by women and girls in Australia.**

This report highlights the significant barriers preventing access to mental health care, the impact of domestic and family violence (DFV), and the critical role psychologists play in improving health outcomes.

It draws upon extensive research, including APS member and community surveys, as well as data from national health agencies.

## **State of women's psychological wellbeing**

Women and girls in Australia face unique and compounding health challenges across their lifespan (Gammage, 2019). They are more likely than men to experience multiple chronic health conditions, including depression, anxiety disorders and trauma-related conditions (ABS, 2023b; ABS n.d; AIHW, 2024b).

Among women aged 18 years and over, nearly half (45%) have experienced a mental health problem at some point in their lifetime (AIHW, 2023b).

Access to quality psychology services remains a pressing concern for women and men alike. Cost is a significant barrier, with 73% of women citing financial constraints as a reason for not seeking help. Additionally, those living in rural and remote areas face challenges related to service availability and the need to travel long distances.

Psychology professionals and the community overwhelmingly support increased government investment in mental health, with almost 70% of Australians calling for expanded Medicare coverage for psychology services.

## **Domestic and family violence (DFV) and psychological harm**

DFV remains one of the most severe threats to Australian women's psychological health. One in four women has experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner since the age of 15, and almost one in four has suffered emotional abuse (AIHW, 2024d). The cost of DFV is estimated at over \$22 billion annually (KPMG, 2016).

Community sentiment reflects the urgency of this crisis. Survey findings show that 64% of Australians are very or extremely concerned about DFV against women, while 70% believe psychologists play a crucial role in supporting survivors.

Additionally, 83% of Australians believe that those impacted by DFV should have greater access to psychological services, and 78% say it is extremely or very important for the government to prioritise addressing this issue.



Psychologists play a crucial role in supporting victim-survivors by providing trauma-informed care, advocating for systemic change and educating the public on the psychological impacts of DFV.

However, gaps remain in the training of psychologists and health professionals, with 20% of provisional psychologists and psychology students reporting no formal education on working with DFV survivors. Additionally, 93% of psychologists agree that the government must take stronger action to address the psychological impacts of DFV.

## **Key APS recommendations**

To address these critical issues, APS proposes several key policy recommendations:

- Expand trauma-informed training for psychologists and health professionals to improve support for DFV survivors.
- Allow direct access to psychologists for DFV victim-survivors without requiring a GP referral.
- Establish a volunteer DFV Professional Support Network to assist frontline workers and reduce burnout in the sector.
- Increase Medicare rebates for psychology services to reduce out-of-pocket costs and improve access.
- Introduce bulk-billing incentives for psychologists to encourage service provision in rural and underserved areas.

Note: see the full list of recommendations on pages 47, 63 and 79 of the report.

This *Thinking Futures* report underscores the urgent need for systemic reform in Australia's mental health sector, with a particular focus on improving access to care for women and girls.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, health professionals and the APS can work together to create a future where all women and girls have access to the psychology services they need to lead healthier, safer lives.