

Attention: Pru Goward MP
Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Assault
NSW Government, Family & Community Services, Women NSW
By email: womennsw@facs.nsw.gov.au

NSW Sexual Assault Strategy: Public Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the NSW Sexual Assault Strategy.

The Young Women's Advisory Group (YWAG) of the Equality Rights Alliance is a group of 10 women under the age of 31. We have representatives from across the country, including NSW, bringing young women's voices and perspectives to state and national policy spaces.

YWAG acknowledges the importance of prevention and education about sexual assault and sexual violence. In 2015, YWAG surveyed over 1000 young women aged 16-21 nationally about their experiences of sexuality and relationships education at school (27.61% of respondents were from NSW). We have attached our *Let's Talk: Young Women's Views on Sex Education* report which details our findings.

In late 2016 YWAG launched our report [A Whole Generation out of Date](#), which captures the findings of three focus groups run as part of the Let's Talk: Young Women's Views on Sex Education project.

YWAG believes that it is crucial for young women's voices to be included in the development of the NSW Sexual Assault Strategy. Young women aged 18-24 are at the highest risk of experiencing violence¹. Further, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)'s "Change The Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities" supports current statistics on the prevalence of sexual assault in NSW². With women three times as likely as men to have been sexually assaulted in a university setting in 2015 or 2016³, it is imperative for prevention and response strategies to be informed by the experiences and expertise of young women.

Young women, like all young people, have agency, and can contribute analysis and perspectives from a particular set of life experiences that need to be both respected and included in conversations and for the development of equitable policy.

We look forward to the outcomes of the NSW Sexual Assault Strategy Public Consultation, and are available for further comment regarding our research and advocacy with young women. For further information or to discuss the content of this submission, please contact Hannah Gissane, Projects Coordinator for the Equality Rights Alliance, at era.projects@ywca.org.au.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) *Personal Safety Survey*, cat. no. 4906.0, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0>

² See statistics cited in NSW Sexual Assault Strategy Progress Report (2016)

³ Australian Human Rights Commission, (2017) *Change the Course: National report on sexual assault and sexual harassment in Australian universities* <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/change-course-national-report-sexual-assault-and-sexual>

Recommendation 1: Comprehensive sexuality and relationships education is a vital strategy for inclusion in the Strategy

Drawing on primary prevention literature and our consultation with young women, YWAG sees comprehensive sexuality and respectful relationships education within schools as a vital strategy for inclusion in the broader NSW Sexual Assault Strategy. Forty eight per cent of young women surveyed by YWAG in 2015 reported that they did not feel confident in their understanding of consent after sex education in school, so it is imperative to retain and strengthen this content in the curriculum.

Our report provides recommendations for the inclusion of eight key components in sexuality and relationships education. Such education requires resourcing to support quality training, professional development, and support for teachers which is accurate, sensitive, and evidence based training. Further, comprehensive sexuality and relationships education requires accountability from Government to ensure it is accessible across NSW regardless of geographic location, socioeconomic background, cultural background, education sector or religious affiliation.

YWAG recently provided feedback on the NSW Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) K-10 draft syllabus for consultation, emphasising the importance of education in the prevention of interpersonal, domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 2: Image-based abuse should be considered in the development of the Strategy

Image-based abuse, including the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, should be understood as an act of technology-facilitated sexual harassment, violence or abuse. There is an emerging view that this abuse should be considered on the spectrum of sexual violence⁴. A recent report from RMIT found that young people and lesbian, gay and bisexual people, are particularly at risk of image-based abuse⁵. Moreover, we note that like other forms of sexual violence, the non-consensual sharing of images is a gendered practice, as it is primarily perpetrated by men, and because the social costs to women are greater when their images are shared⁶.

The NSW Sexual Assault Strategy should include actions to respond to image-based abuse, support victims of such abuse, and prevent its occurrence.

⁴ McGlynn, C., Rackley, E., and Houghton, R. (2017) 'Beyond 'Revenge Porn': The Continuum of Image-Based Sexual Abuse'. *Feminist Legal Studies*. 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-017-9343-2>

⁵ Henry, N., Powell, A., and Flynn, A. (2017) *Not just 'revenge pornography': Australians' experiences of image-based abuse*. Victoria: RMIT.

⁶ See Henry, N., and Powell, A. (2014) 'Beyond the 'sext': Technology-facilitated sexual violence and harassment against adult women'. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 48 (1):104-118; Walker, S., Sanci, L., and Temple-Smith, M. (2013) 'Sexting: Young Women's and Men's Views on Its Nature and Origins'. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 52:697-701; Powell, A., and Henry, N. (2014) 'Blurred Lines? Responding to 'Sexting' and Gender-based Violence among Young People'. *Children Australia* 39 (2):119-124.; and Henry, N. Powell, and Flynn, A. (2017) 'Not just 'revenge pornography': Australians' experiences of image-based abuse'. Victoria: RMIT.

Recommendation 3: Ensure young women's experiences, including experiences of assault, are heard and valued

Young women, like all young people, have agency, and can contribute analysis and perspectives from a particular set of life experiences that need to be both respected and included in conversations and for the development of equitable policy. YWAG values young women's voices, experiences and expertise, and works towards meaningful and genuine representation, participation and engagement.

This is equally important in the context of providing young women with safe, adequate, and supportive processes for reporting disclosures of sexual assault. Domestic violence services as well as sexual assault and rape crisis services provide informative guides to responding to disclosures⁷. The NSW Sexual Assault Strategy should include actions to improve and implement responses to disclosures and reporting at an institutional level.

⁷ For instance, see Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia's (formerly NSW Rape Crisis Centre) fact sheet "Responding with compassion when someone says 'I have been sexually assaulted'", <http://www.rape-dvservices.org.au>