



Taking action to end technology-facilitated family violence

April 2024

Warning: The following action includes information and an account of family, domestic and sexual violence.

We are all made equally in the image of God, and God desires hope-filled lives for all of us. Our faith reminds us that to love God is also to love others and ourselves. In our homes and through our most intimate relationships, we learn foundational characteristics of love, respect, and trust. The effects of violence are far more profound than physical damage. Violence impacts us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually – to our very sense of self. When it takes place in the home by people who are trusted, violence has an even deeper impact on those things that are foundational and life-giving in relationships: trust, respect, and a sense of being loved.

Digital technology can be used to facilitate family, domestic and sexual violence. The increased use of digital technology in both personal and professional lives has resulted in technology-facilitated abuse becoming more widespread. Digital technology has provided enhanced opportunities for perpetrators to exert greater control, monitor, stalk, and harass the targets of their abusive behaviour. Perpetrators can use mobile phones, social media, global positioning system (GPS) tracking devices and online accounts (such as e-mail) to control, abuse, track, and intimidate their targets. It can include the perpetrator accessing or hacking the victim's e-mail or social media account to discover her personal information or to send offensive e-mails to her friends, family or workplace that appear to come from the victim.

The impacts of technology-facilitated family, domestic and sexual violence include:

- Victims refrain from undertaking daily activities or contacting support services;
- Amplifying levels of fear of victims because of being controlled or harassed; and,
- Victims can experience mental health issues, with hypervigilance and ongoing fear leading to anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

He was stalking us and found our location twice through [our IP address], and Telstra was being very unhelpful, even though they're supposed to be linked to domestic violence services ... They were being very unhelpful, and it took me over 12 months, and we had to get the Telecommunications [Industry] Ombudsman in twice to help me close an account down because they wanted to try and fine me for breaking the contract.

Account from a survivor of family and domestic violence, in Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, "Technology-facilitated abuse: Interviews with victims and survivors and perpetrators", July 2022, p. 29.

The Commonwealth Government agency, the eSafety Commissioner, released a report in October 2023 on technology-facilitated abuse. The report found:

- 72% of Australians that have used a dating app or website have experienced sexual violence; and,
- 99.3% of Australian professionals who support survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence had clients who experienced technology-facilitated abuse.

The people most at risk of technology-facilitated abuse as part of family, domestic and sexual violence are:

- Women and girls;
- First People Women;
- Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- Women with a disability;





- LGBTQI+ people; and,
- Women in rural areas.

Action by the Australian Government

The Commonwealth Government has taken some steps to address technology-facilitated family, domestic and sexual violence. It has committed \$16.6 million over four years from mid-2022 to mid-2026 for the eSafety Commissioner to develop a service, including a helpline, to provide practical advice, support, and guidance to survivors of technology-facilitated family, domestic and sexual violence and the frontline workers that support them. A further \$10 million was provided between mid-2022 and mid-2027 for a community grants program to support community projects aimed at preventing technology-facilitated abuse of women and their children.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

Senator the Hon. Katy Gallagher

Minister for Women
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP

Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

The Hon. Michelle Rowland MP

Minister for Women's Safety
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

The Hon. Justine Elliot MP

Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Assistant Minister

Points to make in your letters:

- Express concern about the role technology devices can play in facilitating and amplifying domestic and family violence.
- Ask that the Government require technology corporations, including dating apps, to work with the eSafety Commissioner to ensure that their products are safe by design.
- Ask that the Government require technology corporations to have easy-to-use and accessible complainant mechanisms and to take action to prevent ongoing abuse in a timely manner. For dating apps that should include allowing a victim of abuse to be able to retain messaging history after they have blocked someone to have the evidence that police need to follow up a complaint.

Resources for congregations

Resources on family violence can be found at the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria: <https://www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/our-publications>

Uniting Vic.Tas family violence services can be found at:

<https://www.unitingvictas.org.au/services/family-services/family-violence-services/>

Resources on addressing technology-facilitated domestic and family violence can be found on the eSafety Commissioner's website: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/women>