

Summary of Recommendations to the White House Gender Policy Council for the U.S. National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence

COLLECTED FROM VIRTUAL PARTICIPANTS IN THE NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT CONFERENCE AND PREVENTCONNECT, SEPTEMBER 1-3, 2021.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“It is essential that we, as a movement and a nation, take a holistic and intersectional approach to ending gender-based violence. Violence is preventable.” – SANDRA HENRIQUEZ, ValorUS

On September 1 and 3, 2021, ValorUS (VALOR) hosted two listening sessions to solicit input from the field of sexual assault providers and prevention practitioners into the U.S. National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence. The first listening session was a follow-up to the 2021 National Sexual Assault Conference (NSAC) hosted by VALOR. The second listening session focused on prevention for participants in VALOR’s national project, PreventConnect, the nation’s largest online community of gender-based violence prevention practitioners.

“GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE” IS INTERSECTIONAL AND MULTI-FACETED

Included in the name of the National Action Plan due to its prolific use in an international policy and human rights context, the term “gender-based violence” (GBV) generated significant discussion. The key takeaways from this conversation included:

- The National Action Plan’s understanding of GBV must reflect the prevalence of systemic violence as well as interpersonal – and to be inclusive of violence, physical and non-physical, perpetrated against people with multiple and intersecting identities (LGBTQ, racial identity, disabilities, religion, age, etc.)
- The scope of what constitutes GBV must include a focus on misogyny, exploitation, and abuse as functions of the imbalance of power in society. This includes a recognition that vulnerable people are often of a specific shared identity, and that violence occurs when groups are targeted because of that identity – but that this does not occur on the basis of “gender” alone.
- The use of GBV should focus on who causes harm, why, and how, in addition to focusing on those who experience it.

LEADING WITH PREVENTION

“The National Action Plan should call for more effective and accountable governance of programs that impact the root causes of gender-based violence (such as income insecurity) and that directly address gender-based violence.” – Blue Shield of California Foundation

During the web conferences, there was strong collective agreement that a National Action Plan should focus on prevention strategies rather than intervention or response stands out as the most critical need. Despite significant gains in recent years, prevention remains the most under-resourced and underappreciated element of government approaches to ending gender-based violence. The National Action Plan should place prevention strategies front and center, and expand its focus to include supporting the most promising practices in the field – including addressing the inequities in society that function as root causes of gender-based violence.



EMPOWERING AND ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

“Safety from gender-based violence is found in the fabric of our relationships, our families, and communities, rooted in values of love, mutuality, justice, and collective care.” – LISA FUJIE PARKS, Prevention Institute

A key approach of the National Action Plan must be to directly include the communities it is seeking to serve in its implementation, and to empower communities with the resources necessary to create and sustain their own strategies for ending gender-based violence.

This includes:

- An intentional and specific commitment to continue to consult with communities directly – particularly those that are frequently underserved and overlooked, such as indigenous communities and transgender communities – throughout the implementation of the National Action Plan.
- Empowering small, diverse organizations serving vulnerable populations directly with multi-year, non-onerous funding for community-based projects.
- Increased funding for prevention strategies, and an increased focus on training and education about healthy gender norms and respect for all identities along the entire continuum of gender – especially for children with trauma.

MOVING BEYOND CRIMINALIZATION

“The solutions and strategies to address harm MUST center survivors at every point – from disclosure, to recovery, to restoration, and survivors should be able to dictate their own healing journey without barriers based on money, location or identity.” – CORRINE SANCHEZ, Tawa Women United



Participants in the listening sessions were adamant about the need to create solutions outside of a law enforcement and criminalization paradigm. This underscores the necessity of updating the nation’s understanding of our primary goals related to addressing gender-based violence, and clearly communicating that a strategy of creating and clearing more crimes is insufficient and counterproductive. The National Action Plan’s priorities should unambiguously reflect an understanding that over-investment in criminalization and response has not yielded the desired outcome of communities being safe and free from violence. To rectify this, the plan should promote the following:

- Formal ratification of international agreements and legal frameworks to hold the United States Government accountable for its commitments to ending gender-based violence (including the Equal Rights Amendment, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and others).
- The presence of economic supports – including housing, health care, and education – as part of the metric for a healthy society free from violence, and addressing the social inequities that cause violence rather than viewing it as a disconnected issue.
- A central focus on reducing racial inequities and directly engaging with the legacy of race-based hierarchies in the United States that contribute to the violence experienced by racially diverse populations.
- Continued de-emphasis on solutions involving law enforcement, and an increased emphasis on restorative and transformative justice practices that are not housed within law enforcement or government.

Compiled by John L. Finley, Policy Manager, October 2021