



UWA
Public Policy
Institute



The Lifetime Price of Harm

Economic Costs of Sexual Violence and the Case for Timely Intervention in Australia

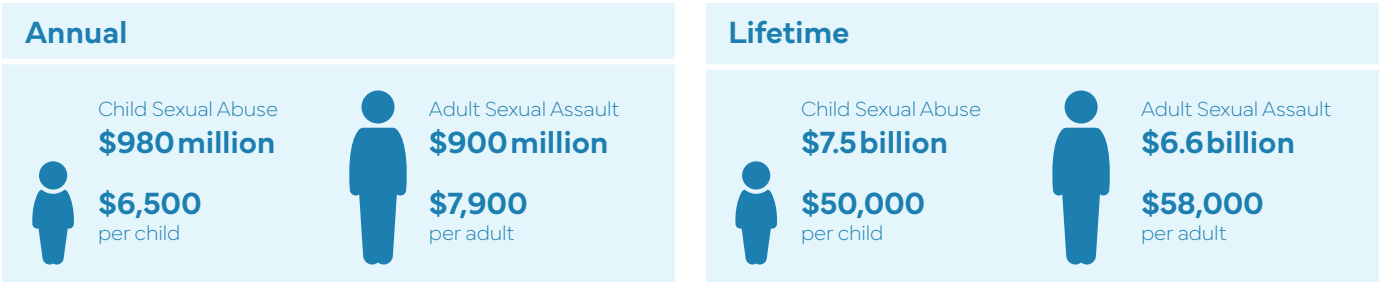
Scope of the problem of sexual violence in Australia	<p>Sexual violence is a pervasive issue in Australia, having acute immediate impacts on victim-survivors and their families and significant downstream costs over an individual's lifetime.</p> <p>Australian governments have made considerable funding commitments to the broader issue of family and domestic violence against women and children, with a small proportion of this effort being directed towards sexual violence specifically.</p> <p>National estimates state that 2.8 million Australians aged 18 years and over (14% of the population) have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. The estimated yearly incidence is 264,000 adults and children.</p> <p>In 2024, over 40,000 sexual assault cases were reported, an increase of 10% from 2023. This is the highest rate recorded to date at 147 per 100,000 persons and marks the 13th consecutive annual increase.</p>										
Strained services create harmful waiting times	<p>This increase in sexual violence support need is colliding with strained specialist services and infrastructure.</p> <p>More than half of clients across Australia may wait from one to several months for appropriate support, delaying critical treatment that can mitigate long-term harm.</p>										
Downstream costs are created, yet avoidable	<p>Delay or lack of access to sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse services increases the risk of chronic health issues, justice involvement, poorer education, family instability, and reduced workforce participation.</p> <p>Missed opportunities for timely support entrench trauma, reduce life quality, and escalate costs in health, justice and social services, creating a cycle of crisis response that magnifies the human and economic loss alike.</p> <p>Sexual violence generates avoidable inter-generational harm, with costs borne heavily by individuals, their families, and communities.</p>										
What needs to happen	<p>There is a clear rationale for governments to increase investment in specialist sexual assault services, to prioritise effective service models and build monitoring systems capable of capturing community demand, costs and savings.</p> <p>Response and recovery services are forms of prevention. The largest savings emerge when downstream harm is prevented from being fully realised over an individual's lifetime.</p> <p>Fragmented, reactive crisis spending obscures the true scale of avoidable downstream costs. Resources that could be redirected to support improved wellbeing, participation and economic resilience.</p> <p>The report makes the following recommendations:</p> <table><tr><th>1</th><th>2</th><th>3</th><th>4</th><th>5</th></tr><tr><td>Develop and release sexual violence strategy and action plans that improve targeted policy coverage and address the consequences of sexual assault.</td><td>Build functional data assets to enable effective assessment and targeting of resourcing and intervention.</td><td>Increase investment in sexual assault services infrastructure and delivery.</td><td>Embed monitoring and evaluation to guide future government responses.</td><td>Adopt an integrated, multi-faceted sexual assault service model.</td></tr></table>	1	2	3	4	5	Develop and release sexual violence strategy and action plans that improve targeted policy coverage and address the consequences of sexual assault.	Build functional data assets to enable effective assessment and targeting of resourcing and intervention.	Increase investment in sexual assault services infrastructure and delivery.	Embed monitoring and evaluation to guide future government responses.	Adopt an integrated, multi-faceted sexual assault service model.
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Read the full
report here



The Evidence

Total economic costs attributable to sexual violence in Australia*



These costs represent approx. **0.5%** of Australia’s GDP for **2%** of the population.

National funding shortfall

Around 68,500 people require sexual assault support services annually, but only 45,700 are engaged with a service **leaving about 23,000 with unmet support needs.**

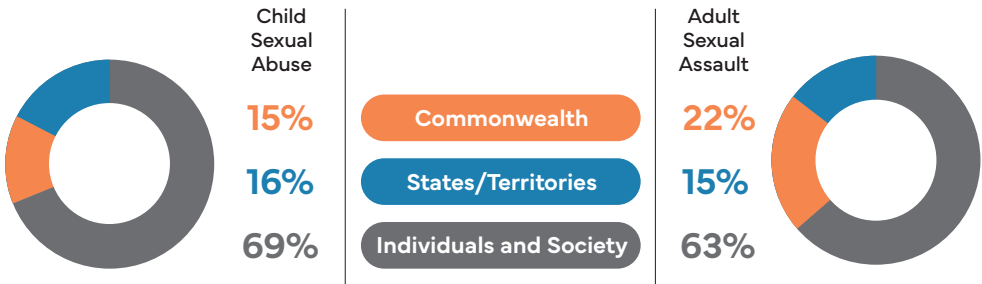
Estimated current national funding (commonwealth and state) is \$160 million annually. **Meeting full demand would require \$240 million, a \$80 million (33%) shortfall.**



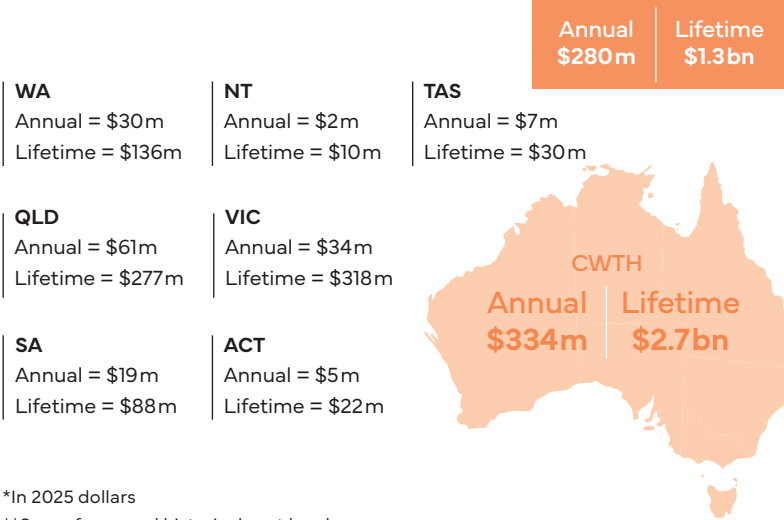
The cost burden is not evenly shared across society

Most of the cost burden falls on the individual and society, through disruptions to **employment, earnings and healthy years lived.**

The remaining costs are shared between the commonwealth and state governments through **foregone tax revenue and welfare, justice and health spending.**



Annual and lifetime fiscal costs



*In 2025 dollars

**Sum of new and historical cost burden

