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Via email: humanservices@pc.gov.au

Dear Commission

### **Productivity Commission Inquiry – White Ribbon Submission**

White Ribbon Australia (White Ribbon) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the *Productivity Commission Inquiry into Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services* (Inquiry) and commends the Inquiry.

#### **White Ribbon**

White Ribbon is a unique, national primary prevention social change organisation that works through a primary prevention approach based on the understanding that men are central to achieving the social change necessary to stop violence against women. We engage men to stand up, speak out and act to influence the attitudes and behaviours of some men who commit violence against women.

Through education, awareness raising, creative campaigns, preventative programs and partnerships, White Ribbon provides the tools for men to stop violence against women in their community and beyond.

#### **Competition in the Market**

White Ribbon appreciates there are benefits to promoting competition in human services, including the violence against women primary prevention sector, provided the market created is fair, rewards best practice and ensures finite resources are deployed to avoid duplication and meet unmet need.

Our particular interest in the Inquiry stems from competition and market distortion created by the allocation of Government funding. Current policy settings within the primary prevention sector create competition in a way that is *not* effective in driving best-practice outcomes.

Government funding is fundamental to driving programs and initiatives across Australia. As a finite resource, it is critical the government and Australian community are getting the most competitive, sustainable, cost effective and, most importantly, effective long term outcomes for every dollar of tax payers' money spent.

White Ribbon urges the Inquiry to address two main points:

1. Federal and State Governments driving market practice that rewards and sustains best practice.
2. Government funding which influences the primary prevention of violence against women market sector in a way that avoids duplication, waste, user confusion and fails to meet gaps/unmet need.

Government needs to be discouraged from adopting strategies, practices and policies that duplicate existing efforts and encouraged to invest in existing infrastructure and programs when these have been evaluated as having a positive impact.

## **Recognition**

Governments at all levels have committed to making Australian communities safer for women and their children. To efficiently and effectively achieve this, governments need to invest in established and proven violence prevention initiatives *that are working* rather than funding duplicate initiatives.

White Ribbon as a social movement understands that people engaging in a campaign are willing and able to make a decision on their own behalf which prevention campaign is for them. Fair competition between initiatives and organisations encourages innovation, strategic collaboration, a focus on outcomes and builds efficiency. White Ribbon believes opening up the market to tender will drive a culture of continuous evaluation and learning; values core to the operational culture of White Ribbon.

Government funding funnelled into the market has the potential to create biased competition. White Ribbon encourages State and Federal Governments to carry out thorough environmental scanning and reporting of existing initiatives in the Third National Action Plan. Consultation with providers of violence prevention programs and campaigns prior to establishing/funding new violence prevention initiatives is critical to avoid undermining established, evidence based and sustainable programs and campaigns.

## **Market Influence**

In a functioning market, feedback received through user choices delivers signals to providers about where they need to improve and also informs fee-for-service models. Government funded 'free' initiatives beyond the pilot phase distort demand and pricing points and can lead to increased barriers to entry, particularly for smaller organisations. They have the detrimental effect of shifting the user choice from 'which product delivers the best outcome or is the most cost effective' to 'which product is free and which isn't'.

The changing landscape of government funding allocation means organisations and programs with the majority or all funding sourced from Government are run in short cycles often with no guarantee of the longevity or amount of funding beyond the next election. Successful long term established programs based on evidence and best practice can cease once funding runs out, which leads to loss of knowledge and social change momentum.

Developing new, similar initiatives is often favoured over the support, improvement and expansion of established and sustainable business models. The result is or can be long term evidence based effective work is being driven out of the market.

Emphasis on supporting and expanding business models that are the most effective, sustainable and efficient would make government money go further and work harder. A more cost effective, lower risk strategy with greater expected return on investment, will create healthy competition whereby providers strive to be the most innovative and concentrate on quality, efficiency, accountability and responsiveness.

Equitable distribution of funding in recognition of the value of diverse, specialised and successful prevention initiatives is critical.

## **Identification of best-practice as key to human services reform**

A strong understanding of 'what works' in human services is key to delivering the reforms identified in the issues paper for this inquiry. We encourage the Inquiry to consider this in relation to two key points:

1. Supporting the development of outcomes measurement in the human services sector: demonstrating the effectiveness of interventions is key to the competitiveness of human services organisations. Some organisations have evaluation tools and processes in place, but there are others that are ill-equipped to prove the difference they are making. Government has a role (as market stewards) and a responsibility (as funder) to support organisations to develop consumer-centred outcomes measurement frameworks and tools.
2. Building on best practice to avoid duplication and waste: when allocating funding, governments should commit to supporting established and proven initiatives. In addition to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the human services sector, this also demonstrates government commitment to reform principles of promoting quality.

Long-term, both of these measures will contribute significantly to the development of an increasingly independent and consumer-focused human services sector.

## **Summary**

Government funding significantly influences the primary prevention of violence against women market sector. The impact of Government funding is maximised when it is used to support organisations to develop sustainable, marketable violence prevention initiatives that can be owned and driven by the community long term and which meet unmet need.

There is an opportunity for Government to encourage providers in the violence prevention sector to think long term and shift from dependence on Government funding to self-reliance through community funding. This can be achieved through acknowledging current successful initiatives and supporting sustainable business models.

Money saved can be invested in other violence prevention activities where there are gaps and/or unmet need or be used to reinstate and increase funding to essential tertiary services. The multiplier effect of an efficient market is vast.