

Supporting
Respectful
Relationships
for 75 years

Relationships Australia Annual Report 2022-2023



From the Chairperson

As Chair of the Board of Relationships Australia Inc., I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands where we live and work. I pay tribute to their Elders past, present, and future. And I thank our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and community partners for the learning and wisdom they generously share with us.

This year, to better understand the Australian relational landscape, we relaunched our Relationship Indicators research. Among many interesting highlights, the study confirmed the negative impact mental ill-health, loneliness, cost of living pressures, and the legacy of the COVID pandemic are having on our relationships. The research also highlighted the significant contribution positive relationships make to our wellbeing and resilience.

Within this landscape of stress, Relationship Australia continues to assist thousands of people navigate relational difficulties and crisis, and this year marked increased demand for our services. Through more than 300 programs, each designed to address specific community and family concerns, Relationships Australia provides much needed assistance. All our services, including couples counselling, family dispute resolution, children's counselling, and community education, focus on supporting individuals to build, repair, and maintain respectful, thriving relationships.

This work is only possible through the dedication of our workforce. I commend the relentless passion of the Federation organisations and their teams; their client-focused, evidence-based practices make us a reliable support for Australians when their relationships are hurting.

I must also acknowledge the exemplary efforts of the National Relationships Australia (RA) Office. Their amalgamation of professionalism, output quality, and approachability significantly augments our Federation's capability.

In closing, it is our commitment to community wellbeing and our understanding of the importance of sustaining positive relationships that keeps us at the forefront of family support services. On behalf of the National Board, thank you to everyone involved in making Relationships Australia a trusted resource in these challenging times.



Dr Claire Ralfs
Chairperson

Acknowledgment of Country

Relationships Australia acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters on which we live and work, and we pay our respect to their elders, past and present.

In recognising their profound connection to this country, we also honour the significance of family and relationships that have sustained and enriched their cultures for generations. May we continue to learn from and live these values as we walk together on this land.

The supports and services offered by Relationships Australia are situated across many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

This report was created at the national office of Relationships Australia, which is on Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country.

Acknowledgement of Funders

Relationships Australia acknowledges the funding provided by federal, state and local governments across Australia which underpins the services we deliver.

We thank the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and Attorney-General's Department in particular for the ongoing trust they place in the Relationships Australia Federation to deliver crucial services in support of families and communities across Australia.

Relationships Australia has provided services supporting relationships across the country for 75 years.

The core of our work is improving people's wellbeing through respectful relationships. Through our programs, we work with people to enhance not only family relationships, but also relationships with friends, colleagues, and across communities. We engage in research and conduct advocacy to broaden understanding of the issues that affect relationships, and ultimately, people's wellbeing.

Relationships Australia believes that violence, coercion, control and inequality are unacceptable.

We respect the rights of all people, in all their diversity, to live life fully within their families and communities with dignity and safety, and to enjoy healthy relationships.

Year in Review

Relationships Australia members provide services for all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances. We acknowledge and respect the rights of all people, in all their diversities, to live life fully within their families and communities with dignity and safety.

Throughout the year, Relationships Australia has remained focused on delivering evidence-based, trauma informed services to clients across the country. With more than 329 different programs and services, Relationships Australia member organisations are committed to providing supports designed to meet the needs of the communities with whom we work.

Our broad range of service offerings include:



Individual and family counselling



Family law counselling, mediation and dispute resolution



Children's Contact Services



Specialised Family Violence Services



Men's Behaviour Change Programs



Employee Assistance Programs



Family Mental Health Support Services



headspace (mental health services for young people)



Supporting Australians with disability through our counselling services connected with the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability



Therapeutic and case management services to Forgotten Australians, Forced Adoption Support Services, Intercountry Adoptee Family Support Service, Post Adoption Support Services and Redress Support Services



A range of tailored services for older Australians, including senior relationship services, elder mediation and elder abuse case management and mediation



Follow our highlights from across the Federation over the past 12 months. Highlights are shared throughout this Annual Report.



Throughout the year, Relationships Australia has continued to take an active role in advocating on a wide range of issues that impact our clients and the communities we serve. Drawing on the expertise and experience of practitioners across the country, and building on evidence collected over almost 75 years of delivering services to vulnerable Australians, we were proud to make contributions to a large number of inquiries and consultations, both at the Federal and State/Territory levels.

Our submissions to public consultations, which are available on our website, included:

-  Paid family and domestic violence leave: Senate
-  Measuring What Matters: Australia's Well-being budget: Treasury
-  Implementation of the National Redress Scheme: Joint Committee
-  Workforce Australia Employment Services: House of Representatives
-  Online gambling and those experiencing gambling harm: House of Representatives
-  The extent and nature of poverty in Australia: Senate
-  Online Safety
-  Family Law Amendment Bill: Senate
-  Long COVID: House of Representatives
-  Access to offenders' superannuation for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse: Treasury
-  Early Years Strategy Consultation: Department of Social Services
-  National Care and Support Economy: Prime Minister & Cabinet
-  Disability Royal Commission
-  Mandatory minimum classifications for gambling-like content in computer games: Department of Infrastructure
-  Australia's Human Rights framework: Joint Committee
-  Federal Budget: Treasury
-  Family Law Amendment Bill 2023: Attorney General's Department

Working to protect the rights of Older People in Australia

In addition to delivering tailored services to prevent and eradicate elder abuse, the rights of older people in Australia has been a significant focus of our advocacy efforts. This has included crucial work with our colleagues, Elder Abuse Action Australia, the Elder Mediation International Network (EMIN), Elder Mediation Australasian Network and Every Age Counts, among others, to raise awareness of the impacts of ageism and promote interventions at both the systems and service levels. Relationships Australia is a strong supporter of calls for an international convention protecting the rights of older people and for service and policy responses that enhance the rights of older Australians in all aspects of their lives.

Supporting intercountry adoptees and their families

Relationships Australia runs the Intercountry Adoptee and Family Support Service (ICAFSS) which is specialist support for individuals impacted by adoption complexities and provides services in every state and territory.

In June 2023, ICAFSS hosted its inaugural national roundtable in Adelaide, uniting 14 delegates from across Australia to deliberate on matters pertaining to intercountry adoption. In parallel, the Inter Country Adoptee Voices (ICAV), celebrating its 25th anniversary, convened 16 of its representatives for face-to-face discussions. These concurrent meetings fostered synergy and enabled collaborative dialogues on forthcoming objectives, reinforcing ICAV's position as an indispensable partner for ICAFSS, rich in lived experiences.



Supporting Children and Young People

Relationships Australia has welcomed a number of critical developments throughout the course of this year focused on supporting the rights and wellbeing of children and young people. In particular, we note the Commonwealth Attorney-General's focus on children and young people in the proposed amendments to Chapter 7 of the Family Law Act 1975. We have long advocated for a family law system that centres the rights of children, and makes their wellbeing the paramount focus of proceedings.

In our work across the country, we engage directly with children and young people, and their families, to provide a range of supports, services and education. In addition to operating Children's Contact Services in over 20 locations nationwide, we provide counselling and related services to children who are victims of domestic and family violence, operate a number of headspace youth mental health locations, and deliver a range of other services dedicated to supporting our future generations.

Our online education platform, Family Connect, has reached over 20,000 families in 2022-23, delivering tools to support families to connect in meaningful ways and enhance the emotional wellbeing of children across the country.

National Research and Collaboration Informing Local Service Delivery

Relationships Australia has long been committed to harnessing the collective wisdom and experience of our team across the country. A key mechanism for achieving this has been through a range of Networks, Working Groups and Communities of Practice which have been established over the years as a mechanism for sharing, collaboration and mutual support among members of the Relationships Australia Federation.

Relationships Australia team members across all levels of our Member Organisations come together in these important forums on a regular basis to share their insights and experiences, problem solve approaches and to learn from each other. Through our networks, working groups and communities of practice, Relationships Australia lives out its commitment to delivering evidence-based services that are tailored to the needs of the community, and informed by national best practice.



Relationship Indicators

The only nationally representative survey that explores the state of relationships in Australia, demonstrating the impact relationships have on our wellbeing.



Previously, Relationship Indicators surveys were conducted by Relationships Australia between 1998 and 2011. In response to the enormous effects of the pandemic and other challenges in recent years, Relationships Australia recognised a shift and was interested in gaining a better understanding of the state of relationships at a national level. Relationships Australia decided to reinvigorate the project with a renewed focus on research design and method, releasing the results in November 2022. The survey was collected by Life in Australia™, which is considered Australia's most methodologically rigorous survey panel. The findings can be accessed via our national website.

The report includes analysis of all kinds of relationships, the pressures and challenges which affect relationships, concepts of loneliness, love and safety, grief and loss, wellbeing and accessing support. The report illustrated a robust link between strong and reliable relationships and better wellbeing and the findings from this report have been quoted in Australia's first wellbeing framework. Relationships Australia is continuing to analyse this data and release special reports on discrete topics. The findings inform our efforts to support all Australians to achieve positive and respectful relationships.

Key Findings

60% chose their **partner** as their most important, meaningful relationship

1.7 mil Australians (or **8.8%**) **feel unsafe** disagreeing with their most important person

59% of people who felt unsafe disagreeing with their important person were aged **55 years** or more

22% said **mental health** is a pressure that affects their most important relationship

24% are exhibiting symptoms of **loneliness**, compared to **17%** in our 2018 Loneliness Report

1/3 of **carers** were lonely and less likely to say that friendships played an important role in their life

81% of people who identified as **LGBTQIA+** faced pressures in their important relationship in the past six months

1/3 of people with a **disability** say their important relationship is pressured by mental health

Neighbours Every Day

In October 2022, our national social connection campaign, Neighbour Day evolved to become 'Neighbours Every Day (NED)'



Continuing our commitment to promoting the benefits of social connection and building capacity for all Australians to make and maintain respectful relationships. A highlight of the campaign was our annual call-to-action day, Neighbour Day, which took place on Sunday, 26 March 2023.

NED highlights



The NED campaign is underpinned by ongoing research and is evidence based. In 2022-23 this included conducting research in partnership with Merri-bek Council and Lendlease to explore the effects of the COVID pandemic on communities and identify the necessary drivers of social connection within communities to promote resilience and support mental health.



A growing number of Very Neighbourly Organisations (VNOs) support Neighbours Every Day and its ethos. VNOs now total 60; with 9 new organisations acknowledged as VNOs in the past year. These are Touched by Olivia, Ending Loneliness Together, Gather My Crew, Good Karma Effect, Outdoors QLD, COTA WA, Hamilton Community House, City of Armadale, and Wardell CORE. VNOs meet quarterly and act as a catalyst for VNO support and engagement. The meetings have been a great opportunity for information sharing and networking.



We enjoyed a wonderful event with federal politicians and staff at Parliament House, Canberra in the lead up to our annual day of action. This 'drop in for a cuppa and a chat' event was popular with many politicians and their staff, who popped by to say g'day to NED Ambassadors Natalie Ahmat, Costa Georgiadis, Julie Goodwin, Mitch McPherson, Mandy Hose, Kate Jones, and Ruby Susan Mountford and the Relationships Australia team.



The NED website continues to provide free resources for year-round and annual day of action use for individuals, businesses, councils and community organisations. Community language resources (social media and infographics) are available in Simplified Chinese, Arabic, Italian, Greek, and new this year, Korean and Vietnamese.



Our family of generous and dedicated Ambassadors grew in 2022-23, with new Ambassadors Mandy Hose, Kate Jones (who's Too Peas in a Podcast has more than 3 million downloads), Daniel and Luke Mancuso, Mariam Mohammed, Ruby Susan Mountford, and Jahin Tanvir joining the campaign.

This year's highlights from across the Federation

National Statistics

2,340 Staff
144,214+ Clients

100+ Locations
97 Outreach Locations
980+ Media Participations

37+ Articles/Submissions/Papers
54+ Rural/Remote Locations
29+ Research Project Participation

329+ Unique Services/Programs Offered
25+ New Programs Launched

Around the country

Canberra and Region

Locations
7

Clients
12,765

Staff
161



Celebrating Diploma of Counselling graduates

In November 2022 we held a graduation ceremony to celebrate the achievement of the nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students, completing their Diploma of Counselling.

Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith was in attendance, addressing the event to congratulate the students and to highlight the importance of the training initiative.

The Diploma of Counselling opportunity was offered to First Nations students across multiple local organisations to further their education, and to create a collaborative network supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Each of the Graduates are now employed in various roles supporting their local communities.



New website launch

Relationships Australia Canberra & Region (RACR) were excited to launch our new website in May 2023. The website is not only more attractive, but also now on a secure platform, providing analytics and data security.

A graphic was created for the website to help convey the span of the organisation. The concept was developed by our staff to be reflective of our region, our clients and our communities.

As one of the most important ways we showcase our services and communicate with clients, the website provides an improved user experience and 'front door' to our service.



Supporting high conflict families across the region

Throughout the 2022-23 Year RACR has supported high conflict families to access support and find alternative solutions across the ACT; and the Riverina, Alpine, South Coast and Southern Tablelands regions of NSW.

Individuals and families have been supported by several targeted services including our specialised family violence counselling and care coordination services; Women: Choice and Change group program for women who have experienced intimate partner violence; Safer Pathways coordination services for male victims of intimate partner violence; and Got Your Back youth program for young people impacted by domestic and family violence.

Locations
11

Clients
15,471

Staff
469

Around the country

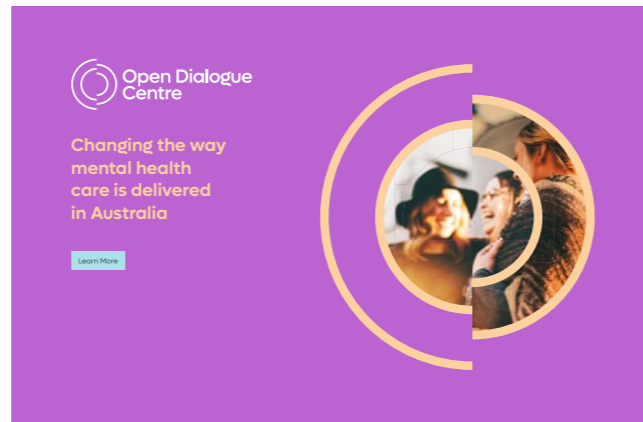
New South Wales



Community Resilience

With natural disasters increasing in frequency and intensity, we're supporting communities to recover from and prepare for fires, floods and other extreme weather events. The Disaster Leadership Program has trained 169 community members across the NSW Hunter, Central Coast and New England regions. The program strengthens community resilience through relationship building and providing training about the impact disasters have on our wellbeing.

Leaders are supported to design and implement community-led recovery projects that reach into their community, strengthening connections to enable them to better recover and prepare for future disaster events. We've supported 24 community-led events that reached over 400 people.



Open Dialogue Centre

The Open Dialogue Centre (ODC) – a joint venture between Relationships Australia NSW and the GrantFamily Philanthropy – officially launched in November 2022. The ODC delivers training and support to help organisations and communities collaborate with individuals, families and experts, working to improve experiences of mental wellbeing.

Through the ODC, we're constructively creating new and innovative ways to deliver mental health services that are genuinely built to centre the experience of the people in need, as well as their social networks. Working with partners, including Monash University and Alfred Health, we're aiming for a more person-centred, family inclusive and holistic approach to mental health care.

Around the country

Northern Territory



2023 marked 50 Year Anniversary for Relationships Australia NT (RA-NT).

In preparing and leading into our 50th year we reflected on our past, we also took the time to continue to build a sense of pride within the organisation and be proud of all we do for our clients and community with a brand refresh.

Our 50 year anniversary has not only enabled us to build our brand awareness within community, with numerous events, refreshed some workspaces in Darwin but to look forward with the launch of our Strategic Planning process for the next three to five years.

Locations
3

Clients
3,034

Staff
65



New programs – Men's Place Grant: RA-NT's partnership with Darwin Indigenous Men's Service (DIMS)

RA-NT & DIMS were one of only 10 successful NT providers for the NT Men's Places Grants to deliver a Respectful Relationships Program for Indigenous clients, assisting ATSI men to undertake an exploration of the meaning of respect, followed by discussion of different types of relationship and the importance of relationship to self.

An exploration of ideas, skills and strategies that support respectful relationships and exploration of some of the issues or attitudes that can get in the way of respectful relationships is also covered. Participants are particularly keen on the tree of life metaphor in the healing and learning journey.

Locations
22

Clients
45,886

Staff
393

Around the country

Queensland



In January 2023, Relationships Australia Queensland (RAQ) welcomed new CEO, Natasha Rae

Natasha is a visionary, engaging leader with an unwavering commitment to delivering genuine outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

Having worked for RAQ for almost 20 years, with over a decade in Executive leadership, Natasha is well known and respected by staff and external partners.

Natasha is committed to working in collaboration with our critical sector partners and stakeholders to respond to the sustained social challenges facing our communities.

The Board looks forward to working closely with Natasha and sector partners to continue to deliver high-quality services and genuine, long-term outcomes for clients.



First Nations Resources for Redress Clients

In late 2022, RAQ launched a suite of digital resources for our Redress Support Service (RSS).

Under the leadership of Aunty Debra Bennet, we worked with First Nations owned and operated creative agencies to produce a suite of culturally appropriate, trauma-informed products.

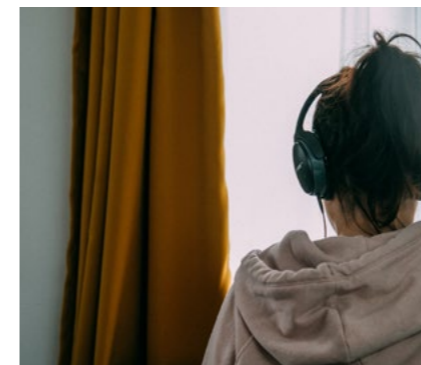
Featuring an animation, podcast, and client journey sheets, the resources focus on the relational experiences of individuals journeying through Redress.

Redress clients have described a sense of 'their spirit being empty'. Simple lines and dots are used to represent the gathering of tools and support along the client journey and a sense of their spirit coming back together.

Four colourways are used representing the different Country that spans Queensland – Coastal, Desert, Forest, and Ocean – allowing clients to choose the resource that best relates to them. You can view the resources at www.raq.org.au/redress.

Around the country

South Australia



SCILS: Schools, Community, Innovations, Learning Support

Supports young people disengaged from mainstream learning. Many SCILS clients present with complex behaviours and high levels of risk as evidenced in a review of DOORS-YP screens. Of concern, 54% previously felt suicidal and 20% currently felt suicidal; 23% felt unsupported emotionally; 36% disclosed major worries about their recent coping. SCILS mitigates these risks at a potentially dangerous time providing case management that builds trustful, respectful relationships and supports tailored, flexible learning. Young people in the program consistently report improved self-belief, abilities, and vision for their future; increased confidence continuing with school/training; and improved wellbeing and mental health.



Minimising Gambling Harm

We have worked closely with the Office of Problem Gambling in line with the Minimising Gambling Harm in SA Investment Plan 2021-2026 which aims to raise awareness of gambling harm, deliver prevention and early intervention responses, and ensure people get the right help at the right time. Our service has delivered gaming and gambling harm seminars to over 2500 high school students across metropolitan Adelaide. Our Lived Experience in Gambling Harm program has also made innovative changes to its delivery format to include panel presentations and podcasts. This has increased diversity amongst the speaker pool and has increased the audience reach.



PEACE: The Good Life Project

A community education program about Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) within African communities, developed a new video training resource. This resource serves to equip service providers with the knowledge and skills required to respond to the needs of African clients and families in a culturally sensitive manner when seeking assistance for FDV-related concerns. The video was developed through extensive community consultations with African community leaders and professionals from various sectors, including legal, education, child protection, and mental health. This informative video will be available via the Relationships Australia South Australia (RASA) website, contributing to enhanced support for FDV-affected individuals and families in African communities.

Locations
9

Clients
19,988

Staff
400

Locations
4

Clients
7,909

Staff
160

Around the country

Tasmania



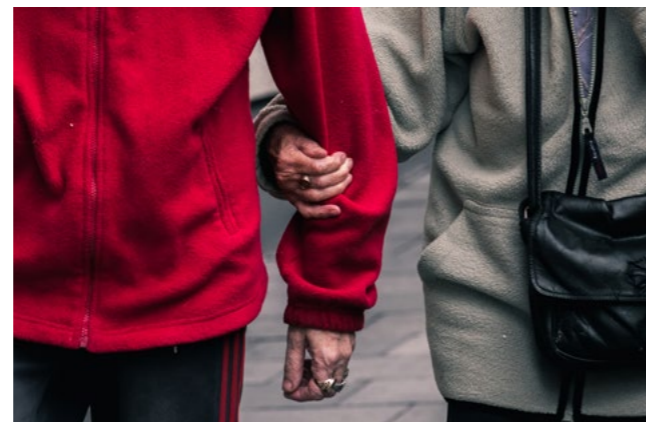
Hearing the voices of Forgotten Australians

In February 2023, we launched The Voices of Forgotten Australians project which consisted of showcasing lived-experience videos and hosting a panel discussion with Forgotten Australians.

The event gave voice to individuals who were subjected to institutionalised abuse, inadequate care, neglect, forced labor, poor educational opportunities, and disconnection from their families.

The hope is that by sharing their stories, valuable insights can be gained on how the community can support Forgotten Australians, particularly as they re-enter institutional care in the Aged Care Sector.

The event was a great success, providing a crucial platform to listen and learn from the untold stories of Forgotten Australians.



Supporting relationships of older Australians

2022-23 was the final year of our Tasmanian Community Fund grant for our Elder Relationship Services. This service was funded over three years to support 150 older Tasmanians access mediation and counselling support to respond to and prevent elder abuse. Across the three years we supported over 400 older Tasmanians and their families.

Feedback from older Tasmanians indicates that for some the service has been life changing. Older Tasmanians report that they are less dependant on adult children, communicate better with family and are no longer in situations that put them at risk.

Relationships Australia Tasmania (RA Tas) is fortunate that in June 2023 the State Government provided interim funding while the Commonwealth funded Specialist Elder Abuse Units are being evaluated.

Around the country

Victoria



Family Advocacy and Support Services Mental Health Support

In October 2022, Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) began providing free, strengths-based mental health services to people with family court matters who are affected by family violence. Delivered as part of the Commonwealth Government-funded Family Advocacy and Support Services (administered by Victoria Legal Aid), our collaborative service recognises clients' intersecting family law, family violence and mental health support needs. We assist clients to manage stress and participate effectively in court processes, as well as providing risk assessments and appropriate referrals pathways to family violence, legal and related support services. Our service has had a strong uptake, supporting almost 700 clients since its introduction.



Vietnamese Men's Behaviour Change Program

This year RAV re-commenced its culturally appropriate men's behaviour change program for Vietnamese men. This program is delivered in-language by experienced facilitators who understand Vietnamese customs and the barriers experienced by migrants. Participants are supported to take responsibility for their use of controlling, abusive and violent behaviour and learn new ways to manage their relationships without using violence. Program topics include healthy relationships, how family violence impacts women and children, and relevant Australian laws and processes. Through our Family Safety Model, a Vietnamese-speaking practitioner also contacts participants' partners and former partners to ensure they are safe and supported.

Locations
21

Clients
20,899

Staff
381



Healthy Clubs, Healthy Relationships

RAV is the lead agency in the 'Healthy Clubs, Healthy Relationships: Preventing family violence through sport', a gender equality-focused partnership with Melbourne City Football Club, the Victorian Amateur Football Association, Women's Health in the North and SBS. This year we developed workshops for Victorian clubs and leagues about gender roles, respectful relationships, resilience, and bystander actions. To ensure that changes are universal, we're working with people across all club levels, from supporters to executives, and supporting clubs to develop gender equity action plans. The program focuses on intersectionality and cultural safety and is supported by Sports and Recreation Victoria.

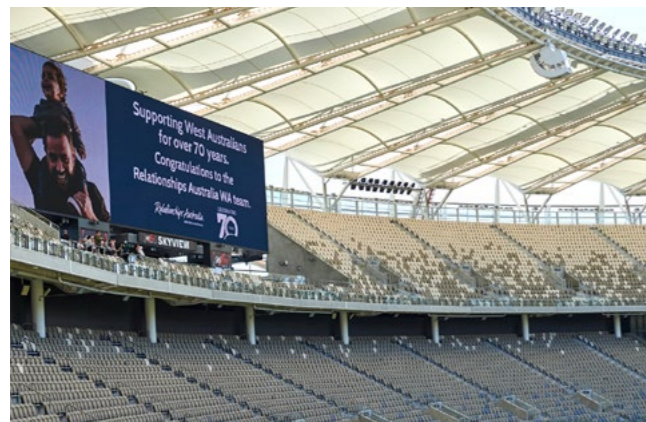
Locations
23

Clients
18,262

Staff
303

Around the country

Western Australia



Celebrating 70 years

This year we celebrate 70 years of supporting respectful relationships: evolving from marriage guidance to navigating life's complex challenges.

In 2023 we've refreshed our vision, purpose, and values – Authenticity, Inclusivity, Compassion, Excellence - and unveiled our three-year strategic plan, continuing to focus on supporting individuals, couples, and families to thrive in their relationships and communities. We were thrilled to celebrate this new vision and plan at an all-staff event, encapsulating our collective commitment to our exciting future ahead.

Our history is full of remarkable milestones such as pioneering Western Australia's first integrated family and domestic violence service, introducing services for Aboriginal communities, and expanding our mental health and specialised support services, ensuring no one is left behind. Our digital timeline captures highlights of a 70-year journey visit relationships.wa.org.au/about-us/our-history.

Leave Safe Stay Safe

In a significant collaboration, Relationships Australia WA (RAWA) joined with Gosnells Community Legal Centre and Regional Alliance West to provide counselling and support to women prisoners affected by family and domestic violence (FDV), as part of a new state government initiative.

The Leave Safe Stay Safe program is a three-year trial, funded by the Department of Justice, within two West Australian prisons, aiming to support and empower women caught in cycles of imprisonment and experiencing violence.

RAWA offer case management, risk assessments, and safety planning. Gosnells Community Legal Centre and Regional Alliance West provide legal aid, supporting women with Family Court matters, child custody arrangements, and family violence restraining orders.

We are proud to be part of this initiative, conducted at Bandyup Women's Prison and Greenough Regional Prison, playing our part in helping women to remain safe after their release.

National Office

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Deputy Chair
Dr Michael Kelly

Directors
Dr Andrew Bickerdike
Dr Stephanie Hodson
Natasha Rae from 16 Jan 23
Terri-ann Maney from 16 Jul 22
Danielle Newport from 1 Sep 22
Dr Ian Law to Jan 23
Elisabeth Shaw



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Saad Kahlid from 5 Jun 23



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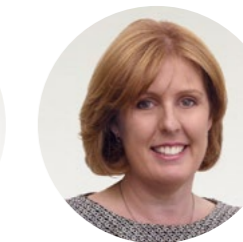
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Chief Executive Officer
Danielle Newport

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