



Australian Government



Services
Australia

Preventing financial abuse through Child Support

June 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

Services Australia recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of this land and their ongoing connection to the lands, seas, and waterways.

We pay respect to all Elders, past and present, of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

We recognise the enduring strength and resilience of the world's oldest continuous living cultures and value the rich diversity Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritages contributes.

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A message from the Chief Executive Officer



Services Australia is committed to reducing opportunities for financial and systems abuse through Child Support to provide a safe and responsive service for parents, so children get the financial support they need to grow and thrive.

Every Australian deserves to be safe from all forms of family and domestic violence including financial abuse. Services Australia (the agency) recognises our role in supporting people through these difficult times and improving safeguards for our customers.

Financial abuse through Child Support threatens the financial stability and safety of parents¹ and children, following separation. It can also cause distress, reduce the ability of parents (predominantly women) to meet their children's needs and place their financial recovery at risk. It is crucial the agency effectively minimises, the risk and impact of financial abuse through Child Support.

The Preventing financial abuse through Child Support strategy is an extension of the agency's Family and Domestic Violence Strategic Commitment. It is for parents, carers, children, community organisations and the broader public. The strategy sets out principles and objectives guiding the agency's ongoing improvements, and how we will monitor progress towards a safer and fairer Child Support system for parents and children.

Complementary to the strategy is our Preventing financial abuse through Child Support action plan. The action plan is a 'living document', which will be updated and reported on each year. We will also continue to work with our government, community and business partners and align our efforts towards the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 (National Plan).

Our goal is a Child Support system that reduces conflict, keeps people safe and ensures children get the financial support they need.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Hazelhurst'. The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal line at the end.

David Hazelhurst
Chief Executive Officer
Services Australia

¹ The term 'parent' is being used for simplicity to refer to paying parents, receiving parents and carers. Carers are customers who receive Child Support because they care for a child but are not the child's parent.

Our family and domestic violence response journey

The agency acknowledges the significant impact and widespread occurrence of family and domestic violence in the community.

<p>2013 Services Australia's Family and Domestic Violence Strategy is introduced</p>	<p>2022 Government announce National Plan (2022–2032)</p>	<p>September 2024 Audit of government systems</p>	<p>December 2024 Services Australia's Family and Domestic Violence Strategic Commitment</p>	<p>November 2025 Services Australia's Zero Tolerance of Abuse statement published</p>
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Our agency has had a **Family and Domestic Violence Strategic Commitment** in place since 2013, informing our ongoing effort to support customers and staff affected by family and domestic violence and we have continually refined and strengthened our approach over time.

In December 2024, we updated our Family and Domestic Violence Strategic Commitment in alignment with the National Plan, to better support customers and staff affected by family and domestic violence.

The agency is committed to taking a greater role to protect the safety of our customers by:

- reducing the opportunity for misuse of the Government systems and services
- preventing gender-based violence, and
- minimising the risk of victims being re-traumatised when interacting with the agency or managing their child support.

This commitment is aligned to the broader Audit of Australian Government Systems to identify areas that are vulnerable to weaponisation by perpetrators of family and domestic violence to remove opportunities for systems abuse.

The agency's work to reduce opportunities for weaponisation is reflected in the implementation of our **Zero Tolerance for Abuse Statement**.

The statement clearly outlines that as an agency, we won't tolerate misuse of our systems and services to deliberately cause harm or have power and control over other people.

By embedding our Family and Domestic Violence Strategic Commitment, we're helping to reduce the risk of further violence and improving system integrity for everyone, including providing better support for separated parents and children.

Our strategy integrates Safety by Design principles, the agency's 2030 Vision and Customer 360° approach, which all reflect the fundamental commitment to putting customers at the centre of everything we do and making our services simpler and safer.

Impacts of financial abuse and systems abuse

Financial abuse, as defined by the agency, involves a pattern of control which affects a person's ability to obtain, use or maintain money, threatening their financial security and independence. It is perpetrated by intimate partners or family members and also occurs in the context of older people and carer abuse.

Financial abuse is a form of family and domestic violence and can begin, continue or escalate after a relationship ends. It is a type of controlling behaviour where the perpetrator controls finances and assets to gain power and control in a relationship.

Systems abuse is the manipulation of systems (Government and private) by perpetrators of family violence, done so to exert control over, threaten and harass victim-survivors. It can often take the form of financial abuse, which may result in depleting a victim-survivor's financial resources and emotional well-being.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that:

- 23% of women, since the age of 15, have experienced intimate partner violence, and
- 16% of women and 7.8% of men (in the general population) have experienced partner economic abuse.²

More specific to the Child Support population:

- In a 2023 survey of 540 single mothers, 80% reported that their ex-partner had replaced physical abuse with financial abuse via Child Support as a way to control them since they separated.³

Financial abuse through Child Support can include refusal to pay, income minimisation and underreporting, non-lodgement of tax returns and structuring finances in a way to avoid enforcement of payments.

The long-lasting impact of family and domestic violence, including financial abuse, such as non-payment and underpayment of child support are becoming increasingly understood.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports:

- 7 in 10 (69%) women left property or assets behind when they moved away from home after their violent relationship ended.
- Women who had experienced partner violence and people who had experienced childhood abuse were more likely to receive government income support than those who had not experienced these types of violence.
- Women who experienced intimate partner violence had higher lifetime health costs than women who did not experience intimate partner violence.

Too often, perpetrators of family and domestic violence exploit and manipulate government systems to control, threaten or harass victim-survivors. This "systems abuse" is often part of a pattern of coercive control and financial abuse that perpetrators use to control or punish their victims.⁴

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021–22), Personal Safety, Australia, ABS Website, accessed 12 November 2025 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/2021-22>

³ K Cook, A Byrt, R Burgin, T Edwards, A Coen and G Dimoloulos, (2023) Financial Abuse: The Weaponisation of Child Support in Australia, Swinburne University of Technology and the National Council of Single Mothers, accessed 12 November 2025 https://figshare.swinburne.edu.au/articles/Financial_abuse_The_weaponisation_of_child_support_in_Australia/26255084

⁴ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (n.d.) Audit of Australian Government Systems, PM&C website, accessed 26 November 2025 <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/womens-safety/audit-australian-government-systems>

Our role

The agency helps separated parents by calculating the amount of child support they pay or receive to ensure children get an equitable level of financial support from both of their parents. Child support legislation, policy and business processes support us to deliver a service focused on income and assessment accuracy and payment compliance.

Child Support is part of a broader government support structure for families and children, which includes Family Tax Benefit and Parenting Payment. A central feature of the child support assessment is the use of a parent's taxable income as determined by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

This interconnectedness, while intended to provide accuracy and ease of assessment, can be challenging for parents to understand, especially for those experiencing financial abuse, and can be vulnerable to weaponisation.

The Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support's 2005 report recognised the "operation of the Child Support Scheme cannot be fully understood without understanding its interaction with the income support system and payments to help families with the costs of children."

The agency recognises the need to minimise the opportunities for weaponisation and financial coercive control through Child Support.

Behaviours associated with financial abuse, such as income minimisation and under payment, impact on the agency's ability to deliver the Child Support Scheme fairly and, more critically, reduces the money available to meet children's needs.

The agency is committed to improving its ability to identify, record and respond to cases of financial abuse and proactively intervene when abuse of the Child Support system occurs.

The agency's response to financial abuse within child support will be built upon our professional and compassionate workforce who are committed to supporting customers with vulnerable and complex circumstances.

Guided by the agency's principles, we'll:



Simple

Reduce the opportunity for financial and systems abuse by ensuring the accuracy of child support assessments, timely collection and supporting customers to make informed decisions about their options.



Helpful

Help customers to safely engage with Child Support by empowering our workforce with the capabilities, processes and tools required to recognise, respond and support customers at risk of financial abuse.



Respectful

Identify, monitor and evaluate the risk of financial abuse through Child Support and take action, where possible, to support at-risk and vulnerable customers.



Transparent

Strengthen our response by increasing government responsibility and stewardship in program design and delivery, working in partnership across government, community and business to improve services.

Our strategic objectives



Safety – parents and children need systems that ensure their safety and financial security, especially customers vulnerable to financial abuse.



Certainty – parents are supported to navigate a safe and reliable system delivering accurate payments on time to support their children.



Equity – children are supported through fair, just and sustainable financial contributions from both parents.



Stewardship – the agency/government takes greater responsibility for identifying and minimising risks within the system affecting children and parents.



Partnership – government, community and business collaborate to prevent and minimise impacts of financial abuse on families.



Our future

The agency is committed to ensuring children receive the financial support they deserve by preventing and reducing the opportunity for, and impact of financial and systems abuse on parents through Child Support. Our strategy is shaped by our objectives of safety, certainty, equity, stewardship and partnership.

Families rely on us to support them to navigate the Child Support system safely and to identify and address financial abuse quickly and effectively. Child support must be paid in full, on time, and in a way that reflects each parent's real financial capacity to ensure children get the support they need and the opportunities they deserve to grow, develop, and succeed.

We'll aim to prevent the misuse of the Child Support program by strengthening how we identify, record and respond to financial abuse.

We recognise that we can't do this alone. We'll continue to engage with community to ensure people with lived experience inform how we design and deliver Child Support services, and work across government to improve Child Support outcomes for parents and children.

As we monitor progress, we'll incorporate feedback and insights from customers, staff, peak bodies and the community to ensure we deliver on our commitment to reduce opportunities for financial and systems abuse through Child Support to provide a safer and more responsive service for parents, so children get the financial support they need to grow and thrive.

Our action plan details the practical and measurable things we will do to deliver on our strategic objectives to improve child support outcomes for parents and children. We will report on our progress by updating our action plan each year.

Together, we'll create a future where every child gets the support they need, and customers are treated with fairness and respect.



