



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026

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Mental Health
Community Coalition ACT

Submission to Inquiry into Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026

July 2026

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

Mental Health Community Coalition ACT is located on Ngunnawal Country. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present. We further acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Custodians and Country and recognise their continuing connection to land, sea, culture and community.

Acknowledgement of mental health lived experience

We also acknowledge the individual and collective expertise of those with a living or lived experience of mental health. We recognise their vital contribution at all levels and value the courage of those who share this unique perspective for the purpose of learning and growing together to achieve better outcomes for all.

About MHCC ACT

The Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT (MHCC ACT) is a membership-based organisation which was established in 2004 as a peak agency. It provides vital advocacy, representational and capacity building roles for the Not for Profit (NFP) community-managed mental health sector in the ACT. This sector covers the range of non-government organisations (NGO) that offer mental health recovery, early intervention, prevention, health promotion and community support services.

We advocate for a mental health system that offers people support and belonging within their community.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Acknowledgement of Country	2
Acknowledgement of mental health lived experience	2
About MHCC ACT	2
Contents	3
MHCC ACT Submission to Inquiry into Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026	4
References	5

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As the peak body for community-based mental health in the ACT, MHCC ACT welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs' Inquiry into the *Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026*.

MHCC ACT advocates for a mental health system that addresses the social determinants of mental health, supports prevention and early intervention, and promotes the mental health and wellbeing of all Canberrans. While MHCC ACT does not hold specialist expertise in family, domestic and sexual violence, we recognise that coercive control has significant implications for mental health, wellbeing, safety and social connection.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (2024) identifies mental health as the most frequently researched and most well-established impact domain of coercive control victimisation. The evidence reviewed by AIFS suggests associations between coercive control and elevated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, use of mental health treatment, lower self-esteem and sense of safety, and mental health related symptoms such as sleep difficulties and nightmares. AIFS also notes evidence that women who experience elevated levels of coercive control experience significantly lower levels of connection with their community. However, due to the research designs of the reviewed studies, AIFS cautions that the relationship between coercive control victimisation and these mental health impacts is not fully established.

These findings indicate that coercive control may have serious implications for mental health, wellbeing, safety and community connection, and we expect this connection to strengthen as the evidence base continues to develop. For MHCC ACT, this supports a response that recognises coercive control as a pattern of abuse with implications for safety, wellbeing, and community connection, and it should be treated independent of any other form of violence.

MHCC ACT supports the Bill on the following grounds:

- 1. Recognition of coercive control as a pattern of abuse**
Criminalising coercive control would enable criminal law to better recognise and respond to this form of abuse. This aligns with the Safety domain of the ACT Wellbeing Framework and with the broader social determinants of health that are crucial to good mental health and wellbeing.
- 2. Consistency with other jurisdictions**
Precedents for this amendment exist in other jurisdictions, including New South Wales and Queensland, which have established standalone criminal offences for coercive control.
- 3. Prevention and early intervention**
From a prevention perspective, shifting the criminal focus from currently recognised acts of violence to recognising patterns of non-physical abuse would provide intervention before escalation occurs.

Recommendation:

To address coercive control meaningfully, MHCC ACT also supports calls for legislation to be accompanied by community education and corresponding support services. These measures are important for people who may not recognise that they are experiencing, or have experienced,

coercive control, and for ensuring that legal reform is supported by accessible pathways to information, safety and support.

References

MacDonald, J., Willoughby, M., Gartoulla, P., Cotton, E., March, E., Alla, K., & Straw, C. (2024). *What the research evidence tells us about coercive control victimisation*. AIFS.



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