

Countering Violent Extremism in the ACT

A strategic approach to addressing violent extremism



Acknowledgement of Country

The ACT Government acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region.

We respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and their continuing culture and contribution they make to the Canberra region and the life of our city.

Acknowledgement of victims and survivors

The ACT Government acknowledges the profound and enduring harm caused by acts of violent extremism and terrorism. These acts result in significant physical, psychological, social, and economic impacts on individuals, families, and communities. We remember and honour those who have lost their lives as a result of these acts, and we recognise the strength and resilience of victims and survivors. Their experiences and voices are essential in shaping effective responses to these threats.

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A message from the Minister

Violent extremism and terrorism are serious and evolving threats to Australia that can harm our safety, our democratic institutions, and the way we live.

The ACT Government committed to preventing these threats.

This document explains the ACT Government's plan to prevent and counter violent extremism. It outlines a whole-of-government approach that focuses on early action, stronger skills and capability, and working together across sectors. Violent extremism has many causes. These include social, personal, and ideological factors. Because of this, no single agency can address the problem alone. By working together, we can identify risks early, take action before harm occurs, and build strong, resilient communities.

Our approach focuses on prevention. We want to stop violent extremism before it takes hold. We do this by improving wellbeing, supporting education, and helping people think critically about the information they see. We also work to counter misinformation and extremist messages. Programs that help people disengage from violent ideas and return safely to the community remain central to our approach.

Innovation is also essential because extremist groups constantly change their strategies. This document highlights the need for new and creative approaches to understand emerging threats, monitor online behaviour, and design proactive responses that keep pace with rapidly changing extremist methods.

We cannot do this work in isolation. Extremism is a challenge that crosses borders and jurisdictions. The ACT works closely with local partners, interstate governments, and

the Commonwealth. Through these partnerships, we share knowledge, strengthen our systems, and contribute to wider national efforts to reduce the risk of terrorism and violent extremism.

Our strategic approach is built on the rule of law, human rights, and public trust. All measures to counter violent extremism must be fair, evidence-based, and subject to oversight.

Preventing violent extremism is a shared responsibility. Strong, inclusive communities are our best defence. Everyone in Canberra should feel safe, respected, and connected. Every sector—government, community groups, educators, and families—plays a role in building resilience and fostering belonging. Together, we can keep Canberra safe, cohesive, and free from violence.



Key Definitions

Violent Extremism is a willingness to use unlawful violence or support the use of violence by others, to promote a political, ideological or social goal. It includes terrorism, other forms of politically motivated violence, and some forms of communal violence, but does not include things such as peaceful protesting, industrial action or nonviolent extremist views.

Radicalisation refers to the process whereby the beliefs of an individual move from being relatively mainstream to being supportive of drastic change in society that would have a negative impact on the rights and freedoms of others. Radical beliefs are not illegal, and radicalisation does not necessarily mean a person will become violent.

Terrorism is a subset of violent extremism and refers specifically to the criminal offence defined in Australian under Part 5.3 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cmwth)*.

Background

Violent extremism remains one of the most complex and evolving security challenges facing the ACT and Australia more broadly. Recent national threat assessments show a rapidly shifting environment shaped by unstable ideologies, fast-moving online radicalisation pathways, and the increasing involvement of young people in extremist activity.

In the 2025 Annual Threat Assessment, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) Director-General Mike Burgess emphasised that today's threat landscape is more dynamic and diverse than in previous years. Proactive and forward-looking responses are needed as traditional approaches are no longer sufficient.

The impacts of social media, mental health, the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories, ubiquitous encryption, growing grievance and the radicalisation of minors all require whole of government, whole of community, whole of society responses.

- Mike Burgess AM,
Director-General of Security
ASIO Annual Threat Assessment 2025

Addressing the underlying drivers of radicalisation cannot be achieved by policing alone. Coordinated, cross-sector collaboration is critical across all social services sectors. A whole-of-society approach brings together government, communities organisations, educators, health professionals, and industry partners, recognising that prevention is most effective when action occurs early and at the local level.

In December 2024, Five-Eyes security law enforcement agencies released their first jointly authored public analysis on youth radicalisation, *Young people and violent*

extremism: A Call for Collective Action. The analysis identified common issues and trends contributing to youth radicalisation, including the online environment, the unique characteristics of adolescent development, and mental health and neurodiversity contributing to vulnerability. It calls for a whole-of-society response, including early intervention, to help identify and counter the issue of youth radicalisation.

Promoting education and awareness among parents, educators and health care providers is important to maximise prevention and support early intervention pathways.

However, violent extremism risks are not limited to young people. A small number of individuals across society continue to seek to cause harm, inspire fear, and undermine community cohesion. Acts of violent extremism can have long-lasting impacts, affecting communities for years.

Over recent years, there has been increased media reporting on radicalisation, violent extremism and harmful attitudes. This has raised public awareness and prompted more public discussion. It also increases the need for clear and consistent public messaging that aligns with national language and supports appropriate information-sharing.

Preventative approaches that expand beyond traditional security responses—and that strengthen early, community-based support—can help deliver a more proactive, person-centred response to violent extremism.

The National Context

Australia's *Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy 2025*, "**A Safer Australia**," sets out a national framework to protect communities from evolving threats. It recognises that terrorism and violent extremism are constantly changing, influenced by factors such as online radicalisation, mixed or fluid ideologies, and the growing vulnerability of young people.

The strategy highlights the rapidly shifting environment, including the emergence of diverse and often contradictory extreme beliefs driven by personal grievances, perceived injustice, conspiracy theories, and broad anti-authority sentiments.

Individuals are cherry-picking seemingly antithetical ideologies to create new, hybrid beliefs. In one case last year, we found an individual apparently motivated by Islamic State propaganda and neo-Nazi propaganda. In another, an individual allegedly described himself as a left-wing environmentalist aligned with Adolf Hitler. Yet another apparently considered himself to be 'a radical communist anarchist' while allegedly embracing nationalist and racist violent extremism.

- Mike Burgess AM,
Director-General of Security
ASIO Annual Threat Assessment 2025

A strategic, long-term approach is essential because reactive measures cannot address the complex drivers of extremism. A coordinated plan helps direct resources toward prevention, early intervention, and rehabilitation. This reduces the likelihood of violence and strengthens social cohesion.

By combining security measures with community engagement and digital safeguards, Australia aims to disrupt pathways to extremism and strengthen national safety in an increasingly interconnected and volatile environment.

The ACT Context

Canberra is a diverse, well-connected and highly engaged community, supported by strong institutions and a shared commitment to inclusion and wellbeing. However, the current environment in the ACT reflects national trends, including youth radicalisation, online grooming through gaming platforms, and the spread of extremist narratives on social media. Canberra's strong digital connectivity, young population and close-knit communities act as protective strengths but also create emerging vulnerabilities.

These local and national challenges have prompted a strategic shift in approach. Rather than relying on reactive measures, the focus is now on strengthening community resilience through engagement and multidisciplinary intervention. This approach draws on local knowledge, reinforces protective factors and enables earlier intervention to interrupt pathways to violence.

By integrating prevention efforts across education, health and community services, and by building strong cross-sector partnerships, we aim to protect the ACT against emerging threats and uphold the values of inclusion and safety that define our community.

Early Support in the ACT

Early support is central to preventing pathways into violent extremism and to keeping people safe. We recognise that vulnerability does not equate to risk and that people should not be labelled or stigmatised for curiosity, identity exploration or distress. Early support prioritises holistic care, inclusion and wellbeing, supporting and listening to people without judgement in order for them to feel connected and valued while helping families and loved ones to access support early.

There are a range of factors that can make someone vulnerable to violent extremism, however, there are some behaviours that may indicate that a person may be vulnerable or becoming radicalised. It is also important to note that these behaviours could also describe the behaviour of someone suffering for a different reason or from a significant life change or shift.

Periods of isolation, bullying, mental health challenges, trauma and exposure to harmful online content can increase vulnerability. Early support responds to these factors through strengths-based intervention that builds protective factors such as belonging and resilience and helps people to navigate the complexity of challenging harmful narratives before harm occurs.

Support is delivered through the ACT Support and Intervention Program (ACT-SIP) which includes organised activities and interventions to help individuals in the ACT who might be at risk of supporting violence for social, political or ideological reasons.

The ACT-SIP is a voluntary program that works to prevent harm by talking to individuals early and giving them other options before they choose violence. The program works with people who may just be starting to show signs of radicalisation, through to those who are actively engaged in violent extremism.

Families and loved ones are key and essential partners in early intervention. Parents, caregivers, family and friends are often the first to notice concerning changes and signs of radicalisation and play a critical role in keeping Canberrans safe and connected. More information on this program and support for people looking to help their loved ones can be found at www.steptogether.gov.au

Is countering violent extremism the same as counter terrorism?

Effective prevention and countering of violent extremism is distinct from but complements law enforcement and counter terrorism activities. Countering violent extremism requires a combination of initiatives that draw on law enforcement, intelligence, social policy, and community expertise to:

- identify and engage those at risk of radicalising to violent extremism;
- rehabilitate violent extremists; and
- undertake focused activities to build communities' resilience to violent extremism and to counter the divisive social impacts of violent extremism by promoting community cohesion.

In the ACT, the arrangements relating to counter terrorism are set out in the [ACT Counter Terrorism Framework](#).

The ACT's Strategic Approach

Our Vision: For Canberra to continue to be a safe, connected and inclusive city where the risk of violent extremism is actively managed.

Our Purpose: To foster an informed, collaborative and strengths-based approach to countering violent extremism in the ACT.

Our Objectives: The ACT Government's strategic approach to addressing violent extremism sets out three key objectives aimed at driving progress towards our mission:

Inform

Inform stakeholders to drive awareness and engagement

This objective focuses on ensuring that all relevant stakeholders—across government, community, industry, and civil society—are well-informed about violent extremism and the measures being taken to prevent and counter it. We aim to build trust, foster collaboration, and encourage active participation in the national effort.

By providing accurate information and practical guidance, we seek to raise awareness of the risks and drivers of violent extremism, as well as the important roles stakeholders can play in prevention and resilience-building. Engagement is not passive; it requires stakeholders to understand the strategy, contribute their expertise, and take ownership of actions within their areas of influence. This includes sharing best practices, amplifying positive narratives, and supporting initiatives that promote wellbeing.

Uplift

Uplift practice through collaboration, research and innovation

This objective strengthens how we counter violent extremism by continuously improving our approaches, informed by evidence and innovation. Violent extremism is a dynamic and evolving threat, and our responses must adapt accordingly. This means building capability across sectors, sharing knowledge, and embracing new ideas.

By leveraging diverse expertise and perspectives, we can create opportunities for joint projects, knowledge exchange, and the co-design of initiatives that address emerging risks and challenges. We will pursue opportunities to deepen our understanding of the drivers of violent extremism, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and identify best practices. This helps ensure that resources are directed where they will have the greatest impact.

Embed

Embed CVE into whole-of-system architecture in the ACT

This objective ensures that countering violent extremism (CVE) is not treated as a standalone initiative but is integrated into systems, processes, and decision-making frameworks. Embedding CVE across government means aligning policies, programs, and services across entities to create a coordinated and sustainable response.

By incorporating CVE principles into governance structures, risk management frameworks, and service delivery models, we strengthen interventions across all relevant areas—from education and health to justice and community engagement. This supports an effective, efficient, and holistic approach to preventing and countering violent extremism.

Our Approach: In pursuing the objectives set out above, activities will be underpinned by five key approaches to the ACT Government's countering violent extremism.

Effective systems: developing and implementing strong processes, governance and system-wide engagement to underpin decision making and delivery of CVE in the ACT.

Nuanced communication: providing relevant, timely and nuanced information to appropriate stakeholders focusing on support and intervention.

Strong partnerships: working with the right people to deliver effective and collaborative responses to violent extremism in the ACT.

Evidence-based: underpinning strategic and operational decisions with research and data.

Locally relevant: taking global and national expertise and contextualising it locally for the ACT's strengths, needs and gaps to find innovative and creative solutions to violent extremism.

Implementation

The ACT Countering Violent Extremism Strategic Approach will inform specific action plans developed by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate to enact the strategy. The action plans will be time bound and outcome specific, allowing flexibility to update and adapt activities in line with changing trends, threat environment and intelligence on countering violent extremism.

Helpful Resources

For further resources and support if you are concerned about someone, reach out to [Step Together](#), a national helpline and website resource to provide information about countering violent extremism.

Phone: 1800 875 204 (9am-5pm AEST Monday to Friday)

Website and Chat Support: [Step Together - Contact](#)

Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

- [Understanding violent extremism](#) – Violent extremism is acts of or support for violence to achieve social, political or legal outcomes or in response to specific political or social grievances. It exists along a spectrum from passive support to active promotion of violence towards ideological goals. People become radicalised and then extremists for many reasons. The causes are complex and unique to every individual.
- [Signs of violent extremism](#) – There are many factors that can make someone vulnerable to violent extremism. They can apply to any age, social class, religion, ethnic or educational background. This page has a list of some potential indicators may indicate someone needs help.
- [Push and pull factors in violent extremism](#) – There is no universally agreed pathway of radicalisation, however it is widely agreed that a mix of outside influences and individual personal motivations (sometimes known as push and pull factors respectively) contribute to a person's interest in using violence to achieve change.

Online Safety

- [Staying safe online](#) – A Step Together resource page.
- [Webinars for parents and carers](#)
- [The eSafety Guide](#) – A list of different apps and their uses, which can be filtered by type, what the app is used for, and colour of the app.
- [Distressing or violent content | How to get help | eSafety Commissioner](#) – Online spaces should be safe for everyone, but you may sometimes come across content that is distressing – especially if it shows extreme violence or acts of terrorism. This page has information about what to do and how to get support if you see online content that is seriously harmful and disturbing.

To report online material

Where possible, report material directly to the platform the material is on, such as the social media site. You can also refer material to the eSafety Commissioner's website for review and possible take down.

Website: [eSafety Commissioner – Report online harm](#)

Supporting loved ones

- How can I help – It may be nothing, but if something doesn't feel right, the sooner you seek help the quicker you can get support. Early community action is the key to helping people avoid the path to violent extremism. It sounds so simple but sometimes just listening is all it takes to help someone you care about. By listening without judgement, you can help someone feel accepted and find a sense of belonging. As a friend, family member, acquaintance or community worker, you are best placed to identify when those around you are vulnerable to violent influence.
- Helping young people have their say – Many of us have ideas of what changes we'd like to see in our society, but it can be hard to know how to turn these thoughts into positive action. Young people, in particular, can feel that their voice is not represented, especially before they are old enough to vote. However, you can help encourage young people (and others in your life) to be positive contributors for change.
- Encouraging critical thinking – In today's digital age, we have more access to information than ever before, and fewer protections in place to ensure that the information we find is unbiased, factual and authentic. This makes the ability to think critically more important than ever.
- Webinars, Podcasts, and Articles archive – A range of resources on the Step Together website. Webinars include:
 - *Unpacking Netflix's Adolescence: Building healthier masculinities in today's world* with a panel of experts
 - *Working with youth in CVE* with Dr Kristy Campion
 - *Working with autistic people in CVE contexts* with Dr Vicki Gibbs.

- Understanding and managing anger – It's important that we learn how to recognise anger in ourselves and others and look at ways we can manage these feelings. If someone you know is struggling to control their anger, you might find it helpful to work through some of the steps on this webpage with them.

Communicating and developing connections with young people

- Developing connections with young people: Insights for how support workers and community leaders can better connect with young people, particularly those who are going through a difficult time.
- How to talk with teens | Psychology Today Australia: Tips to keep communication going when it matters most.
- Difficult conversations: pre-teens & teens | Raising Children Network: Suitable for 9-18 years.
- Teen communicating | Raising Children Network: A range of pages with information to support communicating with teenagers.
- How to connect with a teen that doesn't want to talk: A Parenting Resources Guide - Hand in Hand Parenting

