

Submission to the Parliament of Australia House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence



Homelessness NSW is a peak not for profit organisation that works with its members to prevent and reduce homelessness across NSW.

Our members include small, locally based community organisations, multiservice agencies with a regional reach and large State-wide service providers who work to address and prevent homelessness.

Key services that we provide include policy development and advocacy in working to end homelessness, public education about the changing faces of homeless people and those at risk, information about the diverse mix of initiatives operating in NSW and elsewhere and advice and support for member organisations and others about organisational change and improvement.

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Introduction

Family violence is the most common reason that women and children become homeless.¹ NSW has a lack of safe, affordable support options for families impacted by Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV). Women, children, and young people who need to leave the family home often face lengthy waits and navigate fragmented processes when attempting to secure crisis support and temporary or longer-term accommodation.

As the peak body for Specialist Homelessness Services in NSW, Homelessness NSW witnesses the intersections of homelessness, DFSV and the impact on highly vulnerable key cohorts such as the Aboriginal community and people on temporary visas.

There is an urgent need for the Commonwealth Government to act on funding social housing and provide an adequate and coordinated support system for victim/survivors of DFSV at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The prevention and responses needed to address DFSV have been outlined in length by other specialised peak bodies such as Domestic Violence Victoria.² The Royal Commission into Family Violence found a strong link between being able to access long-term housing and victim-survivors' ability to recover from family violence. It subsequently made a series of recommendations to increase access to housing for victim-survivors of family violence.³

These inquiries into DFSV have provided extensive feedback and evidence-based recommendations. These existing recommendations need to be translated into action in the next DFSV strategies and the Commonwealth Government needs to commit funding to address the crisis in social and affordable housing.

¹ Penney, A., 2012, 'Home and Safe? Policy and practice innovations to prevent women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence from becoming homeless', cited in Domestic Violence Victoria, 2020, *Submission to the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, http://dvvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SUB_200131_DV-Vic_Homelessness-Inquiry_FINAL.pdf

² Domestic Violence Victoria, no date, viewed 11/06/20, *What are we doing to end family violence*, (<http://dvvic.org.au/understand/prevention-and-response-to-family-violence/>)

³ Royal Commission into Family Violence, 2016, Volume 2, http://rcfv.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/Reports/RCFV_Full_Report_Interactive.pdf

Key recommendations

Recommendation 1: The additional \$21 million to support DFSV services during then COVID-19 pandemic should be a permanent addition to funding packages for these services.

Recommendation 2: The Commonwealth Government should provide additional funding and support to meet the demand for DFSV services and support as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

Recommendation 3 The Federal Government should implement a national housing and homelessness strategy to eliminate the unmet demand in Specialist Homelessness Services.

Recommendation 4: The Commonwealth Government provide new capital investment to generate 300,000 new social and Aboriginal housing properties across Australia, including 5,000 social housing dwellings a year until 2026 for low income households in NSW.

Recommendation 5: The Commonwealth Government legislate a new tax incentive or direct subsidy to leverage super fund and other private sector investment in 200,000 low cost rental properties for low and middle-income earners.

Recommendation 6: The Commonwealth Government expand the Core and Cluster program to reconfigure refuge accommodation into independent living with services and support across Australia.

Recommendation 7: The Commonwealth Government maintain the moratorium on evictions and remove accrued rental debt for tenants.

Recommendation 8: The Commonwealth Government implement national policy regulations to redress the power imbalance between landlords and tenants including preventing 'no grounds evictions' by landlords and regulation of the rental market to ensure affordable private rentals across Australia.

Recommendation 9: The Commonwealth Government increase the lowest payments of social security payments such as Newstart Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance

Recommendation 10: The Commonwealth Government reform the superannuation system to close the gendered gap in superannuation.

Recommendation 11: The Commonwealth Government implement measures to redress the gendered pay gap such as maintaining the equal pay funding agreement for the community services sector.

Recommendation 12: The Commonwealth Government legislate a permanent increase in Jobseeker to include the supplement.

Recommendation 13: The Commonwealth Government remove mutual obligations for those on Jobseeker payments.

Recommendation 14: The Commonwealth Government reintroduce the policy of free childcare introduced during the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 15: The Commonwealth Government extend the length of Domestic and Family Violence leave in National Employment Standards.

Recommendation 16: The Commonwealth Government create a stream-lined, safe and confidential trauma-informed database for victim/survivors of DFSV and their families.

Recommendation 17: The Commonwealth Government uniformly support the needs of DFSV victim/survivors through a holistic strategy that unites all areas of government and NGOs support including health, NDIS, legal support, and SHSs.

Recommendation 18: The Commonwealth Government incorporate trauma-informed housing for victim/survivors of DFSV and their families into funding for social housing.

Recommendation 19: The Commonwealth Government expand Safe at Home programs into all regions of Australia.

Recommendation 20: The Commonwealth Government maintain the Equal Pay remuneration agreement to prevent the further reduction in wages of Specialist Homelessness Services staff.

Recommendation 21: The Commonwealth Government stop the introduction of fee increases for social work degrees.

Recommendation 22: The Commonwealth Government guarantee two extra paid weeks leave for SHS workers during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 23: The Commonwealth Government fund a national homeless and housing strategy based on Aboriginal self-determination and Aboriginal control from local Aboriginal community leaders.

Recommendation 24: The Commonwealth Government fund Aboriginal controlled social and affordable housing that is culturally safe to match the need from Aboriginal people seeking assistance from DFSV and homelessness services.

Recommendation 25: The Commonwealth Government expand funding for Aboriginal run, culturally safe DFSV programs, given the prevalence of DFSV in the Aboriginal population seeking homelessness support.

Recommendation 26: The Commonwealth Government works with state government to lack of housing options and homelessness.

Recommendation 27: The Commonwealth Government provides people on temporary visas the same rights to access housing and homelessness services as Australian citizens including temporary and crisis accommodation, social and public housing, rental assistance, and the Staying Home Leaving Violence program.

Recommendation 28: The Commonwealth Government provides those on temporary visas adequate access to service including free legal advice and representation, free interpreting services, and flexible support packages so people can attend to their complex needs and barriers as non-citizens.

Recommendation 29: The Commonwealth Government provides people on temporary visas the same rights to access welfare entitlements as Australian citizens including Centrelink, and Medicare

Recommendation 30: The Commonwealth Government creates a strategy to better understand of the impacts of DFSV on youth homelessness including further collection of data and programs targeted at prevention and support of those children and young people who have experienced DFSV.

Recommendation 31: The Commonwealth Government fund wrap around support for young people, such as Youth Foyers.

Recommendation 32: The Commonwealth Government provides funding for medium to long term support for young people over a 6-24-month period.

Recommendation 33: The Commonwealth Government fund the expansion of RentChoice Youth to all areas in Australia and NSW.

Specialist Homelessness Services and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV)

The link between homelessness and DFSV has been widely researched and documented. Recent increases in homelessness have been substantially driven by rising numbers of women in need of accommodation or other help due to experiencing DFSV, and housing affordability stress.⁴

There are increasing numbers of people seeking assistance from the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) system, as they become at risk of or experience homelessness due to DFSV. The numbers of people accessing services and the unmet demand for services points to the urgent action needed to both address the homelessness crisis and the intersecting crisis of DFSV. DFSV is the most reported reason for needing homelessness services and disproportionately affects women and children. The effects of violence on homelessness are also gendered. DFSV was mentioned as a reason for seeking assistance by 23, 961 men and 89, 004 women in Australia.⁵

The rate of people seeking assistance due to DFSV has been increasing over time as the main reason for people seeking assistance from homelessness services. In 2017-18, this rate was 32 percent more for females than in 2013-14 and 40 percent more for males than in 2013-14.⁶

There has been a disproportionate increase in the number of families who are homeless over the last few years. This has been led by an increasing number of people made homeless due to experiencing DFSV, poverty and a lack of affordable and suitable accommodation.⁷ In 2017-18, 64 percent of people seeking support from SHSs were in a family living arrangement.⁸

In NSW, 38 percent of clients sought support because of DFSV in 2018-19 – an increase from 33 percent in 2016-17, and 26 percent in 2013-14.⁹ Nationally, DFSV was the most common reason identified for seeking assistance – accounting for 28 percent or approximately 80,500 people.¹⁰ NSW was one of three states reporting an increase in numbers of clients experiencing DFSV; recording an increase of 1,200 clients since 2017–2018.¹¹

The NSW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) program saw 72,500 clients in 2018-2019. This was a 42 percent increase since the homelessness reforms in 2014-2015.¹² This is 27% more than SHSs are funded to work with and 25% of the national homeless population.¹³

NSW has the highest unmet need in Australia of 45 percent and unmet need is greater than service delivery.¹⁴ NSW has an average growth rate of clients of 5 percent compared to 3 percent nationally and 25 percent of the national total of clients.¹⁵

⁴ Pawson et al., 2018, *Australian homelessness monitor 2018*, Launch Housing, Melbourne, https://issr.uq.edu.au/files/3347/FINAL_for_print_AHM_full_report.pdf

⁵ AIHW, 2019, *Specialist homelessness services 2017-18 Supplementary tables*, AIHW, Canberra.

⁶ AIHW, 2018, in op cit. AHURI, p.10

⁷ Op cit. Pawson et al.

⁸ Op cit. Valentine 2020.

⁹ AIHW, 2019, *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report annual report 2018-19*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/>

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ ibid.

¹⁴ ibid.

¹⁵ ibid.

The increase in people seeking support from SHSs because of DFSV and the lack of subsequent increase in funding for SHSs results in a growing inability for support services to assist this cohort.

COVID-19 pandemic, DFSV and Specialist Homelessness Services

The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the demand on service providers in NSW. 39 percent of homeless service providers have already reported an increase in demand for services during March and April.¹⁶

Recent studies by the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates the increasing experience of DFSV during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have coincided with the onset of physical or sexual violence or coercive control for many women. Of those women who had reported that they experienced physical or sexual violence in this period, one in three said that this was the first time their partner had been violent to them.¹⁷ For other women, this period coincided with an increase in the frequency or severity of ongoing violence or abuse.¹⁸

In the three months prior to a survey conducted in May-July 2020, one in 20 women (4.6%) experienced physical or sexual violence, 5.8 percent experienced coercive control, one in 10 (11.6%) experienced at least one form of emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviour perpetrated by a current or former cohabiting partner.¹⁹ Two-thirds of women who had experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former cohabiting partner since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic said the violence had started or escalated in the three months prior to the survey.²⁰

There was also a significant proportion of women who were unable to seek help from police, government or non-government agencies and informal services. This is also consistent with concerns raised by support services that found it difficult to engage with women during this period of social distancing.²¹

There is an urgent need for increased funding for the DFSV victim/survivor support system in the current period. Homelessness NSW have heard from members of the increasing pressures placed on services prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. During periods of crisis, the SHS system cannot adequately act to assist vulnerable people unless it is already adequately funded to house and support people at risk of and experiencing homelessness.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NSW government provided \$21 million in additional funding to support DFSV frontline services and other supports. This funding includes the \$8.8 million provided to NSW from the Commonwealth Government in response to supporting women and children experiencing DFSV during the pandemic. This is a welcome funding announcement and should be a permanent addition to the budget for DFSV services to address the pre-existing unmet

¹⁶ Equity Economics, 2020, 'Supporting Economic Recovery in NSW: Investment in Social and Affordable Housing is Critical to Supporting Jobs Today and Families into the Future', https://www.ncoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/policy/Equity%20Economics%20-%20Supporting%20Economic%20Recovery%20in%20NSW_05092020_Final.pdf

¹⁷ Boxall H, et. Al., 2020. *The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Statistical Bulletin no. 28. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sb/sb28>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

demand in services. There should be additional funding as the pandemic continues and the pattern of increasing DFSV also potentially increases and worsens.

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Hidden homelessness

Although DFSV is one of the biggest drivers of homelessness, victim/survivors also choose to stay with perpetrators when there is no suitable housing available.²² A range of service providers and stakeholders suggest that although homelessness is recognised as a consequence of DFSV, its prevalence may be masked by the number of people who have given up seeking help or did not seek it in the first place because of barriers to housing and services.²³

Victim/survivors of DFSV will often stay with friends or family, as opposed to seeking support from SHSs. In 2017 almost 2 in 3 (64%, or 392,000) women who temporarily separated from their most recently violent previous partner moved out of home during one or more temporary separations, and 4 in 5 (81%, or 319,000) of those women stayed at a friend or relative's house.²⁴

As someone with a lived experience of expertise has anonymously stated to Homelessness NSW "I spent six months couch surfing but I didn't realise I was homeless."

Housing for victim/survivors of DFSV

There is an urgent need to provide to provide for housing for victim/survivors of DFSV. Among SHS clients seeking assistance due to DFSV, less than half (47%) of those who were homeless when support began were assisted into housing in 2016-17 and just 4 percent of those who specifically requested long-term housing support received this assistance.²⁵

Temporary and crisis accommodation

When women and families leave a violence relationship or at other times, the experience for many service users is accommodation in a motel for a day or two and then to which refuge has a bed

²² Valentine, et al., 2020, *Supporting families effectively through the homelessness services system*, AHURI Final Report No. 330, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/330>, doi:10.18408/ahuri-7119201

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Personal safety, Australia*, 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra, ABS, 2017.

²⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018, *Specialist homelessness services 2016-17: clients who have experienced domestic and family violence*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2016-17/contents/client-groups-of-interest/clients-who-have-experienced-domestic-and-family-violence>

available.²⁶ Whilst the majority of service users do feel safe in refuges, some found the environment unsafe, particularly in older style motels.²⁷

There are also significant barriers for families accessing refuges, as many boys over the age of 12 are excluded from women's shelters. Few refuges accept pets, which is a significant barrier for victim/survivors and their families. In Australia, 33% of women delayed leaving a violent perpetrator due to fear for the animal's safety and welfare.²⁸

Refuge accommodation is also time-limited, and often at capacity. Many support workers will not move women from refuges because there is nowhere else for them to go.²⁹ NSW has now reached the point where more people who need crisis accommodation do not receive it (21,552) than those who do (18,000). And even if supported by a homelessness service, two in three clients will still be without long term accommodation or housing.

To provide for trauma-informed and strength-based care, refuge accommodation needs to be reconfigured to provide independent living with support, rather than congregate care. The new *Core and Cluster* homes in the Murrumbidgee needs to be expanded across Australia. The cluster refers to the homes or units accommodating families, which surrounds a core office space and communal areas where residents can access services and supports to rebuild their lives.³⁰

Social and affordable housing

One of the main housing pathways for victim/survivors of DFSV is social housing. Social Housing is urgently needed to provide security and affordability to women on low incomes with complex and ongoing needs.³¹

Public or community housing is now only 4 percent of all housing and has been cut to approximately a third of all housing over the last two decades. There has been no national program for building social housing since 1996, except for a short economic stimulus boost to help stave off the global financial crisis in 2009.³²

Commonwealth Government investment in social housing is urgently needed to prevent and stop homelessness. Social housing investment is the most effective way to reduce homelessness, due to its affordable rents, security of tenure, and other supports that are not available to people in the

²⁶ AHURI, 2019, *Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence*, https://www.ahuri.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/45200/AHURI-Final-Report-320-Improving-housing-and-service-responses-to-domestic-and-family-violence-for-Indigenous-individuals-and-families.pdf

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ A. Volant et al, *The Relationship between domestic violence and animal abuse: An Australian study*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 23 issue: 9, 2008, pp. 1277-1295, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0886260508314309>

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Department of Communities and Justice, 2020, *Expanded Griffith Refuge to Support Domestic and Family Violence Victims*, Australian Government, https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/781054/expanded-griffith-refuge-to-support-domestic-violence-victims.pdf

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Gray, R., 2020, *We must act on homelessness before COVID-10 winter*, <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/social-affairs/we-must-act-homelessness-covid-19-winter>

private rental market. Financially vulnerable people in social housing are less than half as likely to become homeless as a similar group renting privately. In Australia one third of new tenants in social housing are previously homeless.³³

Research commissioned by the Community Housing Industry NSW (CHIA NSW) indicates that NSW requires 5,000 social housing dwellings a year until 2026 for low income households.³⁴

The recent report by Equity Economics demonstrates the impact of social housing as economic stimulus in the current period of economic recession. 5,000 additional units of social and affordable housing would cost \$1.88 billion in 2020-21 and would support 18,000 construction jobs across NSW.³⁵

Recommendation 4: The Commonwealth Government provide new capital investment to generate 300,000 new social and Aboriginal housing properties across Australia, including 5,000 social housing dwellings a year until 2026 for low income households in NSW.

Recommendation 5: The Commonwealth Government legislate a new tax incentive or direct subsidy to leverage super fund and other private sector investment in 200,000 low cost rental properties for low and middle-income earners.³⁶

Recommendation 6: The Commonwealth Government expand the Core and Cluster program to reconfigure refuge accommodation into independent living with services and support across Australia.

Rental affordability is essential for victim/survivors of DFSV

There is extremely limited affordable housing in the private rental market for those on the lowest incomes in NSW, which is a major barrier to housing for victim/survivors of DFSV, given the intersections of this experience with poverty, gendered incomes, and Indigenous disadvantage.

According to Anglicare's National Rental Affordability Snapshot, just 4 percent of all properties were affordable and appropriate for households on government income support payments. For households on the minimum wage it was 26 percent. It is impossible for single people. There was just one property out of more than 69,000 that was affordable and suitable on the Snapshot weekend for people receiving Youth Allowance and only two for a single person on Newstart. Just 554 properties were affordable for a single person on the Aged Pension, and only 317 were affordable for a person on the Disability Support Pension.³⁷

This snapshot is more unaffordable for people in Sydney, with a rental average of \$400/week, above the \$370/week national median across Australia in January 2019.³⁸

³³ ACOSS, 2019, *How to reduce homelessness and boost incomes and jobs: social housing as infrastructure*, <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ACOSS-Brief-Social-Housing-Investment-as-Infrastructure.pdf>

³⁴ CHIA NSW, 2016, *Social and affordable housing projections 2016-2026*, <http://communityhousing.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/1806-CHIA-Judy-Yates-research-report.pdf>

³⁵ Equity Economics

³⁶ Everybody's Home, 2018, *More social and affordable homes*, available online:

<https://everybodyshome.com.au/our-campaign/more-social-and-affordable-homes/>

³⁷ Anglicare Australia, 2019, *Rental Affordability Snapshot*, <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/final---rental-affordability-snapshota302da309d6962baacc1ff0000899bca.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

³⁸ Rent.com.au, 2019, *Rental Market Snapshot*, <https://www.rent.com.au/blog/rental-snapshot-january-2019>

231,000 low-income households paid more than 30 per cent of their income in rent. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an existing wait list of 60,000 applicants for social housing in NSW, leading to wait times of up to ten years.³⁹

The Commonwealth Government needs to act to make renting fairer for tenants and more accessible for those on low incomes to prevent homelessness.

Recommendation 7: The Commonwealth Government maintain the moratorium on evictions and remove accrued rental debt for tenants.

Recommendation 8: The Commonwealth Government implement national policy regulations to redress the power imbalance between landlords and tenants including preventing 'no grounds evictions' by landlords and regulation of the rental market to ensure affordable private rentals across Australia.

Recommendation 9: The Commonwealth Government increase the lowest payments of social security payments such as Newstart Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Gendered homelessness

In NSW, women comprised 57.8% of those accessing homelessness services and 66% of the unmet demand.⁴⁰ Economic independence is a major factor for women leaving violent relationships and DFSV intersects with poverty. Systemic barriers for women include the gendered pay-gap, the sector based segregation of women in the workforce and the economic impact of parental responsibilities.⁴¹ Women are likely to have half the superannuation as men at retirement in Australia.⁴² These factors all contribute to the gendered nature through which homelessness disproportionately impacts women and victim/survivors of DFSV.

Recommendation 10: The Commonwealth Government reform the superannuation system to close the gendered gap in superannuation.

Recommendation 11: The Commonwealth Government implement measures to redress the gendered pay gap such as maintaining the equal pay funding agreement for the community services sector.

Welfare support

³⁹ Canberra Times (2019) 'Homelessness worst in NSW and growing', available online:

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6234211/homelessness-worst-in-nsw-and-growing/?cs=14231>

⁴⁰ op. cit. AIHW 2018-19 Annual Report

⁴¹ KPMG, 2016, *She's price(d)less: the economics of the gender pay gap*,

<https://www.apf.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=2023f00a-83e0-48ad-a6fe-610f8bbc2e51&subId=463848>

⁴² The Greens Party, 2019, *Policy initiative: close the gender gap*,

<https://greens.org.au/sites/default/files/2019-05/Greens%202019%20Policy%20Platform%20-%20Close%20the%20gender%20wage%20gap%20%28May%202019%29.pdf>

Socio-economic disadvantage, loss of employment and livelihoods, are strong structural causes of DFSV and barriers to victim/survivors recovering and leaving DFSV.

Economic insecurity has been repeatedly linked to multiple types of violence against women and children.⁴³ Negative coping strategies in the face of economic insecurity result in severe and chronic stress, which is a trigger for conflict and intimate partner violence. In a cross-border study across 31 countries last year, it was found that:

- a 1 percent increase in male unemployment correlated with 2.5 percent in physical intimate partner violence for women, and
- increases in female unemployment correlated with decreases in intimate partner violence by similar magnitudes (about 2.75 percent).⁴⁴

To prevent and assist victim/survivors of DFSV the Commonwealth Government needs to actively prevent poverty through providing adequate welfare provisions. Victim/survivors also have additional barriers when homeless, particularly when considering the impact of trauma and caring for children by women having left DFSV. The complexities and difficulties of leaving violent relationships are significant and can make daily activities challenging. Victim/survivors may be harassed regularly by the perpetrator. The Federal Government system needs to adequately support this cohort through providing adequate welfare support to protect the rights of victim/survivors of DFSV.

Recommendation 12: The Commonwealth Government legislate a permanent increase in Jobseeker to include the supplement.

Recommendation 13: The Commonwealth Government remove mutual obligations for those on Jobseeker payments.

Recommendation 14: The Commonwealth Government reintroduce the policy of free childcare introduced during the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 15: The Commonwealth Government extend the length of Domestic and Family Violence leave in National Employment Standards.

System integration

Homelessness NSW advocates alongside other Domestic and Family Violence peak bodies for a holistic, whole of system approach to addressing DFSV. Victim/survivors navigate a fragmented and re-traumatising service system, that does not coordinate services for people when they are most vulnerable.

As someone with a lived experience of expertise has anonymously stated to Homelessness NSW:

⁴³ M. Ulbrick, 'A man's home is his castle. And mine is a cage': a feminist political economy analysis of economic abuse in Victoria'. PhD Thesis. Melbourne, Monash University, 2020.; D. Parkinson, *Women's experience of violence in the aftermath of the Black Saturday Bushfires*. PhD Thesis. Melbourne, Monash University, 2015.

⁴⁴ S. Bhalotra, U. et.al., 2019, *Intimate Partner Violence: The Influence of Job Opportunities for Men and Women*, The World Bank Economic Review, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/961291579703477493/pdf/Intimate-Partner-Violence-The-Influence-of-Job-Opportunities-for-Men-and-Women.pdf>

When I left my perpetrator, I thought things would be easier, but it just became much more difficult. The trauma of having to fit into boxes that I did not fit in just prolonged and multiplied my experiences of homelessness. There were times that I could not even breathe with the amount of pressure being applied to me by systems that were supposed to help me.

The experience of people and families that are victim/survivors of DFSV is complex and often requires multiple forms of support across different sectors. It is re-traumatising for victim/survivors to re-tell their story and navigate multiple areas of bureaucracy ranging from the court system, justice, social services, housing, and mental health. The linkages between SHSs and health services is crucial as to whether victim/survivors received assistance and recover from their trauma. Victim-survivors of DFSV often first seek support through a health service, with 1 in 5 disclosing DFSV for the first time to a GP.⁴⁵ Many victim/survivors will need to access a range of different services including counselling, peer support programs, health support, legal advice, and financial counselling.

Recommendation 16: The Commonwealth Government create a stream-lined, safe, and confidential trauma-informed database for victim/survivors of DFSV and their families.

Recommendation 17: The Commonwealth Government uniformly support the needs of DFSV victim/survivors through a holistic strategy that unites all areas of government and NGOs support including health, NDIS, legal support, and SHSs.

Specialised housing for victim/survivors of DFSV

Since the *Going Home Staying Home* reforms there have been significant gaps for the SHS sector including service provision to women and children escaping DFSV which intersects with temporary visa holder communities, and Aboriginal people.

Victim/survivors of DFSV and/or families also require specialised housing and support and options based on a trauma informed and strength-based approach. Homelessness is one inter-locking component to a complex and multi-faceted issue of DFSV.

There is a specific need for housing DFSV victim-survivors in spaces that are designed for healing and processing of trauma, including spaces for families suited to the needs of children of different ages. Recent locations of social housing in NSW which assume that one size fits all people and families, such as the Arncliffe Estate, are not suitable for victim/survivors of DFSV.

As someone with a lived experience of expertise has anonymously stated to Homelessness NSW “I needed to feel safe, that I wasn’t surrounded by people, and that I had enough space in my home so that I wouldn’t feel closed in after all the trauma I’ve been through”.

An example of housing designed to accommodate for the multi-faceted nature of DFSV and the specific needs of victim/survivors is Freedom House in New York. This refuge is fully accessible with individual apartments designed to assist all survivors and their children, with mental health supports and multi-lingual staff.⁴⁶

Staying in their own homes is the preference for some women and children experiencing DFV, preventing homelessness and having to leave work, schools, and other support networks. Safe at home programs such as *Staying Home Leaving Violence* (SHLV) in NSW can provide the level of support

⁴⁵ J. Spangaro & A. Zwi, *After the Questions: Impacts of Routine Screening for Domestic Violence in NSW Health Services*, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, The University of New South Wales, 2010, p. 22

⁴⁶ Freedom House, 2020, *Barrier Free Living*, <https://www.bflnyc.org/programs-services/#freedom-house>

and safety that women require to be safe after the perpetrator of violence leaves. Despite positive evaluations SHLV is not available in all jurisdictions of NSW, and there are similarly not Safe at Home programs available in all regions of Australia.

Recommendation 18: The Commonwealth Government incorporate trauma-informed housing for victim/survivors of DFSV and their families into funding for social housing.

Recommendation 19: The Commonwealth Government expand Safe at Home programs into all regions of Australia.

Supporting practitioners in DFSV

Practitioners in SHSs working in DFSV require recognition as highly skilled and specialised practitioners. This should be reflected in the training, wages, and career progression of DFV workers in SHSs. This includes training for vicarious trauma and supporting this critical section of workers which have been ‘essential workers’ during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 20: The Commonwealth Government maintain the Equal Pay remuneration agreement to prevent the further reduction in wages of Specialist Homelessness Services staff.

Recommendation 21: The Commonwealth Government stop the introduction of fee increases for social work degrees.

Recommendation 22: The Commonwealth Government guarantee two extra paid weeks leave for SHS workers during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aboriginal people

Aboriginal people comprised nearly one third of Specialist Homelessness Service users in NSW in 2018-2019.⁴⁷ This increase in proportion of Aboriginal clients accessing homelessness services had been maintained since 2017-18.

Whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people represent 3.5 % of the NSW population, they represented 7.3% of the people who were homeless in NSW on Census night in 2016.⁴⁸

In NSW, 38 percent of people seek support from SHS because of DFSV– an increase from 31 percent four years ago. A survey of Aboriginal Specialist Workers found that during COVID-19, 44 % experienced an increase in the number of clients and half reported an increase in the complexity of needs of clients.⁴⁹

Acute shortages in crisis, transitional and long-term housing particularly in regional and remote locations mean Indigenous women and children are routinely turned away from refuges and safe

⁴⁷ op cit. AIHW 2018-19 Annual Report

⁴⁸ ABS (2018) ‘Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Australians’, in Cox Inall Ridgeway (2020) ‘Overview Report: Community engagement report back and strategic advice for improving the provision of specialist homelessness services for Aboriginal people in NSW’, p.2.

⁴⁹ Johnstone, A., et al., 2020, Experiences of Indigenous women impacted by violence during COVID-19. Women’s Safety NSW, https://www.womenssafetynew.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EMBARGOED-UNTIL-26.06.20_Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Indigenous-women-experiencing-DFV-1.pdf

house because they are at capacity.⁵⁰ This means that they become trapped in a revolving door between crisis and transitional services, homelessness – often involving shelter with family or friends, or returning to an unsafe home.⁵¹ This is a likely factor in the high rates of domestic and family violence injury and death among Indigenous women.⁵²

The private rental market remains a major pathway for Aboriginal people out of homelessness, despite substantial barriers to attaining and maintaining rental accommodation. The high cost of home ownership means that less than 40 per cent of Indigenous adults are homeowners, compared with 66 per cent of the non-Indigenous population.⁵³ Most live in rental accommodation, with 21.5% in social housing due to difficulties accessing private rental because of high rental costs and discrimination.⁵⁴ Social housing stock is essential for Indigenous individuals and families.

Housing stability is a particularly complex issues for Indigenous households, as large, crowded, multi-family households, together with frequent visits from kin, heighten the risk of tenancy breaches and eviction.⁵⁵ This is in contrast to mainstream rental housing which is based on stable household arrangements of nuclear families and more fluid occupancies than Indigenous households.⁵⁶

Many Indigenous women in situations of DFSV experience a situation of triple victimisation, through family violence, removal of children, and homelessness. The lack of housing pathways is a major contributor to repeated child removals.⁵⁷ Mandatory reporting of DV and child abuse, as well as duty of care mean the involvement of child protection services is likely if the home environment is violent are housing conditions are insecure.⁵⁸ Addressing the homelessness crisis for Indigenous women through a holistic, rights based approach is critical with choice for Indigenous women with children.

This needs to involve Aboriginal women as the best-placed to assist with prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. The *Breaking Silent Codes* Project is led by Aboriginal women to address the epidemic of DFSV, and to break the intergenerational impact of DFSV inflicted since colonisation. Professor Megan Davis argues “Indigenous women comprise just over half the population; within their communities, women are the primary nurturers and caregivers, and they hold important cultural and leadership roles. Yet for decades they have borne the brunt of violence”.⁵⁹

A crucial part of service delivery is the right of Aboriginal people seeking assistance to access Aboriginal controlled organisations. Despite the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people as service users in NSW, the number of Aboriginal organisations funded to provide homelessness services is negligible – of 224 current contracts only 14 involve Aboriginal providers.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Cripps, K. and Habibis, D.(2019) Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families, AHURI Final Report 320, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/320>

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ AIHW, 2019, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus on housing and homelessness*, AIHW, Canberra.

⁵⁴ Stacey 2003 et al. 2006 in op cit. Crips et at. 2019

⁵⁵ Op cit. Cripps, K. et al., 2019, p.8

⁵⁶ Habibis et al. 2013 in Cripps, K. et al., 2019, p.8

⁵⁷ Op cit. Cripps, K. et al., 2019, p.42

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.42

⁵⁹ Gordon, D, 2019, *Breaking Silent Codes – across Australia & the Pacific against Sexual Abuse & Domestic Violence for First Nations Women*, Ligare/Colour Copy Centre.

⁶⁰ FACS (2019b) ‘Background Paper: specialist homelessness services Recommissioning in 2020 and Aboriginal Service Provision, unpublished. In op. cit. Cox Inall Ridgeway, p, 3.

Aboriginal controlled organisations are best placed to lead an understanding of the complex cultural dynamics facing the Aboriginal women and families experiencing DFSV, including the significance of Indigenous kinship, connection to land, and the ongoing impact of colonisation and assimilation policies on successive generations.

Recommendation 23: The Commonwealth Government fund a national homeless and housing strategy based on Aboriginal self-determination and Aboriginal control from local Aboriginal community leaders.

Recommendation 24: The Commonwealth Government fund Aboriginal controlled social and affordable housing that is culturally safe to match the need from Aboriginal people seeking assistance from DFSV and homelessness services.

Recommendation 25: The Commonwealth Government expand funding for Aboriginal run, culturally safe DFSV programs, given the prevalence of DFSV in the Aboriginal population seeking homelessness support.

Recommendation 26: The Commonwealth Government works with state government to lack of housing options and homelessness.

People on Temporary Visas

People on temporary visas experiencing DFSV are on a range of different visas – including partner, family, student, work, visitor, and bridging visas. People on temporary visas and their children experiencing violence often face specific and compounding barriers to accessing support. Perpetrators of violence against people on temporary visas use these barriers to maintain power and control and to continue to use violence against them. Due to the high risk of homelessness and poverty, a person on a temporary visa may make the difficult decision to stay with, or return to, a violent partner. This can increase the risk of the victim-survivors experiencing further violence that could lead to serious injury or death.⁶¹

This situation has worsened for women experience DFSV since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey conducted by Domestic Violence NSW has found that service providers observed the COVID-19 crisis has impacted on people on temporary visas experiencing violence in the following ways:

- Increased sexual, domestic or family violence (45%)
- Increased complexity of client needs (64%)
- Decreased access to income, food and essentials (64%)
- Decreased access to community supports (64%)
- Decreased referral pathways for clients (48%)
- None of the above (9%)⁶²

People on temporary visas face numerous additional barriers including:

⁶¹ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence, 2018, *Path to Nowhere: Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence and Their Children*,

https://www.homelessnessnsw.org.au/sites/homelessnessnsw/files/2018-12/Path%20to%20Nowhere_0.pdf

⁶² DVNSW, 2020, *DVNSW Briefing Paper June 2020*, <https://www.dvnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/DVNSW-Briefing-on-People-on-Temporary-Visas-Experiencing-Violence-June-2020.pdf>

- inability to access housing (NSW Housing policy prevents people on temporary visas from accessing transitional, social and public housing and rental assistance)
- inability to access healthcare (NSW Health policy excludes people without Medicare from accessing public hospitals except in limited circumstances; Commonwealth policy prevents people on temporary visas from accessing Medicare except in limited circumstances)
- inability to access income (Commonwealth policy prevents people on temporary visas from accessing Centrelink; People on temporary visas may have no or limited work rights depending on the visa type and conditions, and childcare responsibilities)
- challenges in accessing crisis accommodation (Service providers do not receive specific funding to assist people on temporary visas. Some service providers limit the number of people on temporary visas they support due to the high costs of supporting people without income for extended periods and their inability to access long-term housing)
- risk, fear and threats of deportation and separation from their children (People on temporary visas face complex intersecting legal issues relating to domestic violence, immigration, family, and child protection law and require legal advice and representations)
- lack of culturally safe and accessible services and free interpreting services
- limited social networks and access to support, lack of understanding of their rights

Recommendation 27: The Commonwealth Government provides people on temporary visas the same rights to access housing and homelessness services as Australian citizens including temporary and crisis accommodation, social and public housing, rental assistance, and the Staying Home Leaving Violence program.

Recommendation 28: The Commonwealth Government provides those on temporary visas adequate access to service including free legal advice and representation, free interpreting services, and flexible support packages so people can attend to their complex needs and barriers as non-citizens.

Recommendation 29: The Commonwealth Government provides people on temporary visas the same rights to access welfare entitlements as Australian citizens including Centrelink, and Medicare

Young people and children

Homelessness NSW has heard anecdotally that many young people experience homelessness due to DFSV, but this is not well recognised or understood within the service system, or in government policy more generally.

The impact of DFSV is different to that of adults and requires particular housing and support systems to assist young people presenting alone, assist children or young people in families, and provide a linkages to support children in Out Of Home Care, prevent entry into youth justice and the range of other supports young people and children experiencing DFSV and homelessness will likely need.

Approximately 1 in 6 (16%, or 1.5 million) women and 1 in 9 (11%, or 992,000) men had experienced physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15. Parents were the most common perpetrators of physical abuse before the age of 15.⁶³

Young people who received child protection services were 9 times as likely as the general population of the same age to enter the youth justice system. This increased to 16 times for young people who

⁶³ AIHW, 2019, *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia-2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

were in out-of-home care. Of the young people who accessed both child protection and youth justice, more than 4 in 5 (82%, or 3,000) accessed child protection first. Young Indigenous people were more likely to encounter youth justice first (22% compared with 15% of non-Indigenous young people).⁶⁴

Young people and children at risk of or experiencing homelessness require specialised support and funding packages, particularly the cohort who face or experience due to DFSV. This includes preventing children and young people who have experience DFSV from encountering the justice system and long-term homelessness.

Youth Foyer programs can provide integrated learning, housing, and support service, focusing on education and employment goals. A Youth Foyer provides employment, education, training, and skills development in a stable and secure congregated living environment. Young people exiting a Youth Foyer are much better equipped to be good employees and more likely to sustain employment.⁶⁵

There is also very little medium to long-term accommodation for young people over a 6-24-month period in NSW.⁶⁶ Medium to long term support beyond the time limits of crisis and transitional housing is needed to assist young people to develop health routines whilst in accommodation.

The private rental market is still a major housing pathway for young people at risk of/experiencing DFSV. The policy of RentChoice Youth of supporting young people into the rental market should be expanded to all areas in Australia.

Recommendation 30: The Commonwealth Government creates a strategy to better understand of the impacts of DFSV on youth homelessness including further collection of data and programs targeted at prevention and support of those children and young people who have experienced DFSV.

Recommendation 31: The Commonwealth Government fund wrap around support for young people, such as Youth Foyers.

Recommendation 32: The Commonwealth Government provides funding for medium to long term support for young people over a 6-24-month period.

Recommendation 33: The Commonwealth Government fund the expansion of RentChoice Youth to all areas in Australia and NSW.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Brest, B. et.al., 2019, Position paper: Housing for young people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, available online: <http://yfoundations.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/POSITION-PAPER-Housing.pdf>

Conclusion

There is an urgent need for the Commonwealth Government to address the crises of DFSV and homelessness. The intersection of both these experiences means that funding for social housing and Specialist Homelessness Services will immediately assist vulnerable cohorts and alleviate the pressure of demand on services.

There is growing evidence to suggest that the experience of DFSV and homelessness is increasing as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession continues in Australia.

A whole of government, national strategy to provide necessary linkages across all areas of supports is necessary for a trauma-informed approach to this vulnerable cohort.

The Commonwealth Government can immediately adopt the *Everybody's Home* key asks to address the lack of housing for people leaving DFSV. The Commonwealth Government should also adopt the recommendations from other DFSV peak bodies already existing in recent inquiries into DFSV.

Homelessness NSW would welcome the opportunity to be able to expand on these matters before the committee, in greater detail, should the opportunity be available.

Please contact me on 0425 288 446 or katherine@homelessnessnsw.org.au

Yours sincerely,



Katherine McKernan
Chief Executive Officer
Homelessness NSW

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