

***It Stops Here: Domestic and Family Violence
Framework for Reform***

**NSW Women's Alliance response to the Blueprint for the
domestic and family violence response in NSW.**

February 2016

NSW Women's Alliance

The NSW Women's Alliance is a group of non-government peak organisations, networks and statewide service providers working to improve policy and practice responses to sexual assault and domestic and family violence in our state. The Alliance brings together a range of agencies with a variety of expertise, knowledge and experience in both responding to and working to prevent violence against women, families and communities.

The Alliance currently consists of the following members:

- ACON Health Ltd
- Domestic Violence NSW (co-convenor and secretariat)
- Immigrant Women's Health Service
- Immigrant Women's Speakout Association
- People with Disability Australia
- Mudjin-gal Aboriginal Women's Centre
- Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association NSW
- Muslim Women's Association
- New South Wales Council of Social Services
- NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network
- Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia (co-convenor)
- Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre
- Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service NSW Inc
- Women's Health NSW
- Women's Legal Services NSW
- Youth Action

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Adapted from A Safer State: A Blueprint to end sexual assault and domestic and family violence in NSW. <http://www.asaferstate.org.au/>

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Summary:

The NSW Women's Alliance and NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network produced its own blueprint in early 2015 – *A Safer State: A Blueprint to End Sexual Assault and Domestic and Family Violence in NSW*. This was a pre-election challenge to NSW politicians, government and communities to respond to the domestic and family violence and sexual assault emergency in our state. It made 27 recommendations on leadership, prevention and early intervention and specialist responses to those impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence in our communities.

One year on, the NSW Government is scoping its own *Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint* to analyse service gaps and improve responses to both victims and perpetrators. The NSW Women's Alliance commends the NSW Government for initiatives taken over the last 12 months and the work of Women NSW in consulting with communities, frontline support services, government departments and service users.

Some of the major recommendations of *A Safer State* have been adopted while others have been partially fulfilled. The NSW Government has also made additional announcements relating to addressing domestic and family violence:

- Minister Pru Goward is the first NSW Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault.
- Minister Brad Hazzard, Minister for Family and Community Services, made a specific allocation through the National Partnership on Homelessness to enhance the capacity of specialist homelessness services contracted to deliver domestic and family violence (DFV) support.
- NSW Police are targeting high risk, serial perpetrators of DFV.
- "Domestic violence" is included in the NSW syllabus for all schools years 7-10.
- Women NSW is developing a sexual assault framework.
- Access to *Start Safely* has been extended and the *Staying Home Leaving Violence* program has been expanded to four new sites.

Members of the NSW Women's Alliance consider the NSW Government's *Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint* to be an important next step in the design and delivery of services and strategies to tackle DFV and to implement long term, positive intergenerational change. There are still major areas of work and policy development identified in the 2015 NSW Women's Alliance *Blueprint* that are yet to be addressed including substantial gaps in the specialist service response, an Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy, strategies and resourcing to address issues for people with disability impacted by violence and improvements to the Victims' Rights Scheme and specialist legal support mechanisms. Underlying much of this is a dearth of affordable, safe, accessible housing in most parts of the state.

Members of the NSW Women's Alliance participated in a face to face *Blueprint* consultation with Women NSW in late 2015. The recommendations in this submission supplement the input given during that session. We have updated our original *Blueprint* recommendations to account for policy developments and reforms in the last 12 months.

NSW Women's Alliance recommendations for stronger collaborative approaches between NGOs and government to improve responses to domestic, family and sexual violence in NSW.

A proactive, inclusive and collaborative cross government and community response

1. The Premier, alongside political and community leaders, to demonstrate leadership and commitment by filming messages unequivocally condemning violence against women and families and continuing to make clear public statements that violence against women and children is serious, a crime, a violation of human rights and will not be tolerated in NSW.
2. Support and resource Domestic Violence NSW to lead the development and implementation of sector-driven best practice standards that would underpin governance, legal, criminal justice, support and referral systems, encourage collaborative multi-agency approaches and be client centred.
3. NSW Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Council to have transparency, accountability and meaningful and ongoing engagement with civil society, including the release of a public summary following each Council meeting.
4. The Premier and other Ministers to continue to publically acknowledge the NSW Government's respect for NGO's gendered expertise in specialised service provision and to ensure that specialist service expertise is valued and resourced.
5. Adopt consistent definitions of domestic, family and sexual violence that incorporate core, evidence-based understandings of the psychological harm of trauma and its impacts on child development and on survivors of violence. Government and NGOs to co-design a model, shared understanding of the gendered nature of domestic and family violence and the causes of violence against women to assist communities and services to improve service responses and drive long-term community based prevention initiatives.
6. Ensure that the principles of government and NGO co-design are embedded in all stages of future reform processes. Plan reforms and implement in stages so that each stage builds on and expands upon evaluations of previous work and integrates best practice. Coordinate the implementation of reform and policy development processes across government departments to reduce duplication and enhance efficiencies.
7. Future procurement and tendering processes that impact on women, families and communities to take a strengths-based approach and prioritise stability of best practice support, the safety of clients and expertise developed by specialist services. Adopt Recommendation 10 of the 2015 NSW Legislative Council's *Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs*; to review the competitive tendering process for human services and examine best practice models for procurement that facilitate and encourage ongoing co-design and collaboration and include consultation with non-government service providers.
8. All government and NGO agencies working with women and family impacted by domestic, family and/or sexual violence to provide trauma-specialist, culturally safe practice that acknowledges the gendered nature of violence and the impacts on safety. Implement shared performance measures and data collection across government and NGO programs

and services so that improved outcomes for women, families and communities impacted by violence can be measured and evaluated.

9. Develop and implement a long-term cross-departmental NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy driven by Aboriginal communities. The Family Violence Strategy must intersect with a strong, well-resourced Aboriginal Family Violence Network to develop consistent and evidence-based best practice initiatives that are community driven and reflect diversities and intersectionalities in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

A NSW Aboriginal Women's Advisory Group with members having expertise in sexual assault and DFV should also be established and meet regularly with relevant Ministers and Departmental Secretaries to ensure Aboriginal people have ongoing opportunities to contribute to the development and implementation of the NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy and any other strategies or policies relating to the women of NSW. Regional networks within Aboriginal communities also need to be established to ensure ongoing conversations about sexual assault and DFV which will feed through to the NSW Aboriginal Advisory Group.

10. Government and NGOs to co-design a framework and long term strategy for best practice with families who require culturally sensitive, flexible approaches. Culturally diverse or non-traditional families experience significant barriers to seeking support from mainstream and specialist services or agencies and may face pressures from extended family or community to maintain good relations with an abusive partner. Development of the sector should prioritise increased understanding, skills and resources to respond to intersectionalities and complexities including but not limited to:

- a. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and kinship groups
- b. Where the primary caregiver is in prison, women who are in prison and/or exiting custody
- c. Culturally and linguistically diverse families
- d. Newly arrived migrants and refugee families
- e. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer families
- f. Families where one or more members may have disability including where violence occurs in group homes or institutional settings
- g. Families where there is alcohol or other drug dependency
- h. Families where there is mental illness
- i. Families are experiencing poverty.
- j. Families in rural, regional and/or isolated locations
- k. Young women
- l. Older women
- m. Women and families with complex needs or intersectionalities.
- n. Families with diverse living arrangements

11. Government and NGOs working with victims/survivors of sexual assault and DFV ensure staff have ongoing access to workforce development training for a sexual assault and DFV, trauma informed and culturally competent workforce, including support to address vicarious trauma.

12. Resource Aboriginal women, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas, who can facilitate discussions in a safe place about addressing sexual assault and DFV.

Support to tackle the causes of violence – early intervention and prevention

13. Adopt a coordinated, long-term NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Plan which includes specific strategies and resources appropriate to respond to the diversity of communities affected by sexual assault and domestic and family violence. Strategies must include specific prevention work with children, young people, men and high-risk communities and target education, workplace, social, community and sporting settings.
14. All policies relating to perpetrator interventions and child protection must incorporate a nuanced understanding of the intersections between domestic, family and sexual violence and the impacts on families and communities, family law and access to long term, safe and affordable housing.
15. Programs and interventions to change perpetrator behaviour, which meet minimum standards for such work, must be accredited, regularly audited for compliance and available across NSW. All workers that engage to work with men who perpetrate DFV must be trained and accredited to work with perpetrators of DFV, and should engage specialist supervision of their work from a recognised supervisor in men's behaviour change work. In addition, all individual workers and programs that work with DFV perpetrators must, where possible, develop partnerships with specialist women's DFV services before working with men who perpetrate DFV. Minimum standards must be evaluated and reviewed regularly. Where safe to do so, programs and initiatives that work with perpetrators in a behaviour change capacity must engage with partners (current and past if appropriate) as well as their children and ensure that other appropriate support services are engaged with the partners.
16. Perpetrator interventions should include practitioners working one on one as well as with group behaviour change programs. Appropriate interventions should target defendants in first AVO or criminal charge for DFV matters as well as recidivist high risk perpetrators that intersect with the criminal justice system.
17. Government and NGO specialists to co-design strategies and training around identification of primary victim and primary aggressor. Ongoing training for police, prosecutors, judicial officers, court staff, legal practitioners and other justice workers on risk assessment and management and the nature and dynamics of domestic, family and sexual violence and the impacts of trauma.
18. Develop and invest in a NSW specific education program for women with disability about the nature of violence, based on the principles of Victoria's Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program, and People with Disability Australia's Respectful Relationships training. Provide discrete disability support funding for women with disability who require attendant care upon leaving violence, based on the Victorian Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative.
19. Ongoing collaborative work with the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), child protection services, diverse families, their advocates and experienced legal

professionals including specialist domestic and family violence legal services, to ensure that FaCS' Targeted Earlier Intervention programs meet the needs of all families in NSW and the early intervention elements of the 2014 child protection legislative reforms are implemented.

20. Develop a model for whole of school prevention approaches in NSW across the three school sectors based on best practice developed in other jurisdictions and Our Watch's *Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and their Children in Australia*.
21. Prioritise the funding of Our Watch and ANROWS for the lifespan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*.

A well-resourced, sustainable service and support system

22. A minimum investment of \$100 million over the next 3 years in NSW's specialist domestic and family violence sector. This should prioritise urgent expansion of funding for accessible, specialist, targeted, culturally safe, client-centred services operating within a feminist framework that meet the health, housing, justice and legal needs of all women and families and high risk communities impacted by violence and can meet the demand in their local communities, including but not limited to:
 - a. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and kinship groups
 - b. Where the primary caregiver is in prison, women who are in prison and/or exiting custody
 - c. Culturally and linguistically diverse families
 - d. Newly arrived migrants and refugee families
 - e. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer families
 - f. Families where one or more members may have disability including where violence occurs in group homes
 - g. Families where there is alcohol or other drug dependency
 - h. Families where there is mental illness
 - i. Families are experiencing poverty.
 - j. Families in rural, regional and/or isolated locations
 - k. Young women
 - l. Older women
 - m. Women and families with complex needs or intersectionalities
 - n. Families with diverse living arrangements.
23. Ensure adequately-resourced, trauma-specialist, client-centred services are available to families regardless of geographic location - including specialist women's services. All service responses should work from a gendered analysis of the causes of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, prioritise safety, cultural safety and recovery for their clients across the state. This includes:
 - qualified and skilled case management
 - specialist support options for children impacted by the trauma resulting from experiences of domestic and family violence

- youth-specific responses that recognise and respond to the particular dimensions of young peoples' experience of DFV
 - specialist women's legal services and other legal services that provide gender and culturally-safe support.
24. Expedite the rollout of *Safer Pathway* across NSW with adequate resourcing of all NGO service providers in order to increase the safety and support of women and children with a collaborative, interagency response.
 25. Consistent with the Productivity Commission's recommendation, increase legal assistance funding for civil and family law, including for specialist women's legal services and other legal services that provide gender and culturally safe trauma-specialist sexual assault and domestic and family violence expertise.
 26. Support and resource People With Disability Australia and Domestic Violence NSW to lead cross-sector development through the implementation of *Women with Disability and Domestic and Family Violence: A Guide for Policy and Practice*, to ensure that all domestic and family violence services are accessible for women with disability.
 27. The NSW DV Death Review Team to meet and publically report at a minimum every six months. Where recommendations of the review are not implemented, NSW Government should give reasons for not doing so. Recommendations from both the DV Death Review Committee and the Child Death Review Committee to inform reform processes intersecting with domestic, family and/or sexual violence including children protection.
 28. Explore a model and strategy for the establishment of specialist sexual assault and domestic/family violence courts in NSW.
 29. All courts in NSW to have a safe, private and confidential waiting space for victims of violence.
 30. Strengthen the Victims' Rights and Support Act and Scheme including:
 - Introducing specific categories of recognition payments for domestic violence and a series of DV acts.
 - If a person is able to establish an act of violence and injury on the civil standard of proof that should be sufficient.
 - The form of evidence should not be prescribed.
 - Removing upper time limits for recognition payments for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.
 - Removing the two year time limit for financial assistance for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child sexual assault and child abuse.
 31. Set up collaborative teams of highly specialised police officers, counsellors and support workers at every Local Area Command to ensure rapid responses to victim-survivors of sexual assault and/or domestic and family violence based on examples of successful good practice in other jurisdictions.

32. Conduct research into effectiveness of trauma-specialist psychosocial interventions for women who experience violence. Use this research to inform subsequent policy development and best practice.