

Domestic Violence NSW

Submission to the NSW Homelessness Strategy Discussion Paper



About Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW)

Domestic Violence NSW Inc. is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW. DVNSW provides a representative and advocacy function for specialist services and the women, families and communities they support.

DVNSW's mission is to eliminate domestic and family violence through leadership in policy, advocacy, partnerships and the promotion of best practice. We work with our members, state and federal government and communities to create a safer NSW for all.

DVNSW member services represent the diversity of specialist services working in NSW to support women, families and communities impacted by domestic and family violence including:

- Crisis and refuge services
- Transitional accommodation and community housing providers
- Family support services
- Neighbourhood centres and drop in centres
- Specialist homelessness service providers
- Men's behaviour change programs and networks
- Community organisations working with high risk communities
- Specialist women's legal support services
- Women and children's support services
- Safe at Home programs

DVNSW members are all non-government organisations, some entirely government funded, others supported through philanthropic donations or partnerships with industry or the corporate sector. Many of our members have multiple government and non-government funding streams. DVNSW advocates for best practice, continuous system improvements and innovative policy responses to domestic and family violence including building workforce capacity and representation at all levels of government. We provide policy advice to multiple departments in the NSW Government on prevention and response. We work with communities and the media to increase awareness and represent the sector on a number of state and federal advisory bodies including the NSW Premier's Council on Homelessness, the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Council, the NSW Early Intervention Council, the NSW Reference Group for Men's Behaviour Change, the ANROWS Practitioner Engagement Group and AWAVA. We co-convene and provide a secretariat function for the NSW Women's Alliance with Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia.

We acknowledge the work and practice wisdom of specialist women's services and domestic and family violence practitioners in the sector that underpin the recommendations in this submission. DVNSW thanks the specialist services that have developed best practice over decades of working with women and children and shared their expertise with us to make a submission to the New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) discussion paper, *Foundations for change – Homelessness in NSW*. We also pay tribute to those who have experienced domestic or family violence and to our advocates, colleagues and partners in government and non-government agencies.

For inquiries relating to this submission:

Moo Baulch
CEO, Domestic Violence NSW
ceo@dvnsw.org.au
PO Box 3311, Redfern, NSW 2016.
<http://www.dvnsw.org.au/>
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Executive Summary and Key Recommendations

Domestic Violence NSW welcomes the opportunity to comment on the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) discussion paper, *Foundations for change – Homelessness in NSW*. As the peak body for specialist support services in our state, we have worked closely and collaboratively with the domestic and family violence and Specialist Homelessness Support (SHS) sector to produce a submission that reflects the diversity of the sector and our communities.

We note that as part of the consultation process the DFV service roundtable is scheduled for 9 December 2016. DVNSW would like to ensure that the discussion, feedback, recommendations and outcomes from this roundtable be included in the development of the Strategy.

Homelessness and DFV support-seeking in NSW are increasing. We need coordinated prevention and early intervention strategies that reflect solutions based in local community, consumer and sector expertise. DVNSW is, as part of this submission, calling for concrete solutions to address these gaps and support the SHS sector to help prevent and address homelessness and/or DFV.

DVNSW recommends:

- A better coordinated, integrated, whole of government response to address homelessness and DFV. There are multiple government initiatives, policy developments, pilots and trials which impact on SHS and the prevention and early intervention spaces including Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) reforms, DFV Blueprint and Safer Pathway, Future Directions, Premier's Priorities (youth homelessness, child protection re-reporting and DV re-offending) and whilst these may be coordinated at a local level there is strong evidence that effective structures to coordinate these reforms at a district or statewide level are lacking, particularly in terms of input from peaks at reform delivery board level.
- DVNSW recommends that the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* to be designed to *support* local, client-centred responses, rather than direct them. Every NSW community has unique experiences, service systems, networks and populations, which shape the ability of services to respond to homelessness. Too often services have to make clients fit programs rather than being able to offer truly client-centred responses.
- That issues relating to re-contracting, the capacity of SHS to meet demand and the ability to effectively work in the prevention and early intervention spaces be managed. Our consultation work with DFV services and networks across NSW have highlighted that the GSH reforms continue to affect service delivery. DVNSW along with Homelessness NSW and Yfoundations have called for a four year plan to review and address the current gaps and issues within the SHS program, a fundamental area for successful outcomes.
- That, in addition to a *NSW Homelessness Strategy*, government at both a state and federal level provide adequate resources and funding certainty so that demand is met and effective strategies are developed to address the ongoing and growing affordable housing crisis.
- That strategies to reduce homelessness be developed and implemented specifically for cohorts most at risk of DFV and homelessness: older women, children, young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, LGBTIQ communities, CALD women, women who have no access to income, and women with disabilities.
- That the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* review, explore and invest in further research to explore multiple options for DFV services and housing providers to be able to accommodate pets.
- That the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* includes the voices of those who have experienced DFV and has mechanisms to continue to value the diversity of victim-survivor advocate voices on an ongoing basis.

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1. Introduction and Context

DVNSW, along with Homelessness NSW and Yfoundations, have advocated for a homelessness strategy (the Strategy) with Minister Hazzard as part of the response to systemic issues raised by the sector, and in recognition that there are a number of drivers of homelessness that Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) have little or no control over. Our participation at a significant proportion of the roadshow consultations reflect our keen desire to work with government to address these issues.

An unprecedented spotlight has been focused on issues of sexual, domestic and family violence, particularly in the last two years. Community awareness of DFV is now significant, widespread and more nuanced. It is timely therefore, to reflect on what works in the current system and to strengthen and improve the capacity of NSW frontline services and agencies in responding both to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence as well as finding evidence-based ways to better work with those who use violence. Domestic and family violence is a leading cause of homelessness and the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* must adequately address the concerns of the DFV sector.

The NSW DFV system is struggling to cope with the demand in both the government and non-government response sectors. NSW Police report that DV related assaults have increased by 2% over the last five years whilst most other crimes types are stable or dropping¹. Police, the courts, criminal and justice systems (including the Family Law system), specialist domestic and family violence services, homelessness service providers, specialist legal services, child protection and housing and accommodation services are all at or over capacity. Practitioners constantly have to make choices about which families they can support and to what degree they can provide assistance because of demand.

DVNSW recognises that there are no quick fixes when it comes to addressing system gaps or inconsistencies in service responses. Similarly, there is no “one size fits all” model solution for survivors of domestic and family violence that will work for every community in NSW, even if limitless resourcing were to be available.

With significant, commensurate investment in our mainstream and specialist services and a long-term collaborative vision shared between government, community and the sector, we can build a system that meets the immediate crisis needs of families, supports ongoing recovery from trauma and challenges the roots of violence supportive attitudes. In 2016 domestic and family violence is no longer hidden, private business.

Three key principles underpin this submission:

1. That all NSW citizens should be able to access timely, well-resourced domestic, family and sexual violence support responses located in their communities that are client-centred, trauma-specialist, culturally-safe and are based on the premise that DFV is a gendered crime and a violation of human rights.
2. That significant long-term investment is required to develop evidence-based domestic, family and sexual violence prevention initiatives and strategies including whole of school and community programs that address entrenched gender inequality and violence supportive attitudes.
3. That the NSW Parliament must make a long term, bipartisan government commitment and strategy to ensure a range of safe and affordable housing and support options are accessible to women and families impacted by domestic violence (as well as perpetrators of violence). This includes the expansion of Staying Home Leaving Violence services, adequately resourcing dedicated specialist DFV crisis accommodation and specialist responses to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, community-based services for high-risk populations, transitional, social and community housing and diverse private rental accommodation models and subsidies.

The recommendations in this submission reflect the diversity of views from across the NSW service sector. We propose strategies identified by frontline sector experts to reduce and respond to domestic and family violence and specifically explore the intersectionality between DFV and homelessness.

¹ BOCSAR, 2015 http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_pages/Domestic-Violence.aspx

2. Domestic and Family Violence and homelessness service gaps

NSW has a lack of safe, affordable support options for families impacted by DFV. 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. There is a lack of crisis accommodation across the state and families are routinely referred to emergency temporary accommodation (often in motels or caravan parks) whilst they are waiting for longer-term options to be available. Temporary accommodation is often unsafe and access to outreach support is highly dependent on the capacity of services; DVNSW members report being at or overcapacity the majority of the time. Effective crisis and early intervention responses can be challenging when a victim-survivor of violence is unable to access safe and affordable accommodation.

Ultimately this means that women of all socio-demographics often stay in abusive relationships (or return to them) because of a lack of safe and appropriate housing options. Client-centred, responsive, trauma-specialist support over a transitional period is required to help women and/or their children rebuild their lives following experiences of domestic and family violence whether they choose stay in the family home with or without the perpetrator, are supported through the crisis system or are able to make private housing arrangements.

For some cohorts the challenges are amplified by fears that services or providers may not understand their needs. LGBTIQ victim-survivors of DFV are vulnerable when accessing mainstream crisis services and emergency accommodation due to fears of (or experiences of) homophobia and transphobia and discrimination. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and culturally and linguistically diverse women (CALD) families experience similar difficulties finding safe, culturally appropriate accommodation where they can remain connected to family and community. Women with disability face multiple barriers to accessing information, support or accommodation that meet their needs.

There are multiple systemic and cultural barriers that make leaving the family home almost inconceivable for victim-survivors of violence. Many find it just too hard to contemplate leaving an abusive relationship and their home as the alternative solutions are filled with uncertainty. Older women and young women on lower incomes have very few options and are also vulnerable in a social housing system that is already overburdened. Older CALD women face multiple disadvantages and vulnerability as they often rely on family members for support and speak languages other than English so can experience language barriers.

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence has identified in detail, some of the multiple challenges and failures of under resourced and disconnected responses to domestic and family violence. DVNSW believes that the limitations detailed below echo the issues in NSW, subsequently we strongly recommend the adoption of their related recommendations into the *NSW Homelessness Strategy*:

- All parts of the system—support services, police, courts—are overwhelmed by the number of family violence incidents now reported. Services are not currently equipped to meet this high level of demand, which undermines the safety of those experiencing family violence and their potential for recovery;
- The current response to family violence largely assumes that women will leave their home when family violence occurs;
- Too little effort is devoted to preventing the occurrence of family violence in the first place, and to intervening at the earliest possible opportunity to reduce the risk of violence or its escalation. Similarly, there is not enough focus on helping victims recover from the effects of violence and rebuild their lives;
- There is no dedicated governance mechanism in place to coordinate the system's efforts to prevent and respond to family violence or to enable an assessment of the efficacy of current efforts.²

There are significant gaps in the current NSW DFV crisis accommodation system and DVNSW strongly supports the need for a plan to address them. SHS funded services need to be coordinated and it is crucial that the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint* has an integrated and systematic approach across all of the service systems preventing, intervening and responding to DFV.

² State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations, Parl Paper No 132 (2014–16),

SHS services need to be adequately resourced to respond to the growing numbers of DFV victim-survivors, children and pets as well as perpetrators. Resourcing also needs to be strategic and focused upon prevention and early intervention, trauma-informed care crisis responses and exploration and development of affordable housing options. We are optimistic that there are substantial opportunities for improvements to good practice with strong evidence based models such as *Start Safely* and *Staying Home Leaving Violence* already well established in NSW. Ultimately, however, specialist DFV crisis services and supports need to be resourced adequately to meet the increasing demand.

2.1. Recommendations

- A plan to address the SHS service gaps in responding to DFV.
- The *NSW Homelessness Strategy* needs to be fully integrated and coordinated with the NSW DFV Blueprint development.
- Long term commitment, funding and expansion of Start Safely and Staying Home Leaving Violence.
- Investment in local DFV services so that there is adequate crisis and transitional accommodation, thereby minimising the use of local motels and hotels for temporary accommodation. Support for local DFV services to arrange temporary accommodation for all women and children escaping DFV if no other crisis accommodation is available.

3. Trauma Informed Care (TIC)

DVNSW commends the discussion paper for highlighting and supporting the imperative need for the capacity of services to respond appropriately to trauma. DVNSW is strong supporter for all frontline staff to be comprehensively trained and periodically updated on the principals of TIC.

DVNSW strongly recommends that all homelessness and DFV services adopt practice that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma (including intergenerational trauma), that emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to (re)build a sense of control and empowerment³. Victim-survivors of DFV live in fear of and/or experiences ongoing threats and/or acts of violence. Different forms of violence and/or abuse often co-occur but because they often stay hidden many incidents and violent relationships are often not appropriately acknowledged or addressed.

Trauma profoundly impacts on thoughts, beliefs and behaviours, and an understanding of the effects trauma, trauma reactions and trauma-informed practice responses is essential for all people working with domestic violence victims. DVNSW recommends that services work from a trauma-informed perspective, and ensure that every part of service, management and program delivery systems are assessed and modified to include an understanding of how trauma affects the life of individuals seeking support and the workers delivering the care⁴.

Two strategies promote understanding of trauma and its impacts: trauma-informed policies and training. Trauma-informed policies formally acknowledge that clients have experienced trauma, commit to understanding trauma and its impacts and detail trauma-informed care practices. Ongoing trauma-related workforce training and support is also essential. For example, staff members need to learn about how trauma impacts brain development and how this may affect a client's ability to make decisions or respond appropriate in certain circumstances. Appropriate support activities might include regular supervision, team meetings and staff self-care opportunities.

We recommend that all staff have a solid understanding of vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma is an unavoidable consequence for staff who work with vulnerable or traumatised clients. Work-induced or vicarious trauma is more likely to arise where counsellors, therapists or support workers have the qualities that make them good at their job – such as empathy, relational connectivity and the skills that assist clients to disclose their own traumatic

³ Blue Knot Foundation 2016

⁴ SAMHSA, 2015.

experiences. Vicarious trauma may consist of short-term reactions, or longer-term effects that continue long after the work has finished. Some have even argued its effects are potentially permanent⁵. Managing the risk of this is an important part of Workplace Health & Safety (WHS) policy in any organisation or practice, and is deemed best practice.⁶

3.1. Recommendations

- An investment in appropriate workforce development on the impacts of domestic and family violence and complex trauma (including vicarious trauma) for frontline staff and management across all government departments but specifically in the child protection, justice and homelessness systems.
- Agencies currently providing homelessness services review and subsequently amend their policies and procedures to ensure TIC models are integrated into their current practice.
- That all services (including government agencies) work from a trauma-informed care model of practice, and receive regular professional development to ensure best practice.

4. Early Intervention and Prevention

Successful early intervention and prevention models must be integrated with local service design and include tailored prevention responses if we are to effectively challenge violence in the long term. Violence is preventable but only with all parts of the community, government, mainstream and specialist sectors working together sharing common understandings, goals and measures and minimum standards for service delivery. Access to well resourced, trauma-specialist, client-centred and gender and culturally safe services in conjunction with evidence-based community-led prevention programs could significantly reduce the number of families being impacted by violence and trauma within a generation.

For early intervention, crisis and prevention programs and models to work effectively together, the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* must recognise that issues such as short term funding cycles and isolated program design create fundamental barriers to services working together. Multiple government initiatives and reforms in various stages of implementation often lack of coordination across communities and service structures.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth recently undertook a review of research and practice in prevention and early intervention child and family service systems in Australia and identified a common set of systemic issues.⁷ It found:

- A fragmented and poorly coordinated system in which specific service sectors largely focus on particular issues or groups of vulnerable people without a whole of system view.
- A program focus instead of a client focus, where the onus is on people to make sense of services, navigate from door to door and 'fit' a program to qualify for support.
- Services which fail to consider the family circumstances of clients, in particular the existence and experience of children.
- A traditional welfare approach that focuses on crisis support and stabilisation, and that may encourage dependency.
- A focus on solving problems after they occur rather than anticipating and intervening to prevent them arising (Department of Human Services (DHS), 2011).

⁵ Mouldern & Firestone, 2007.

⁶ Bell, H., Kulkarni, S., & Dalton, L. 2003

⁷ ARACY, 2015 Better Systems, Better Chances: A Review of Research and Practice for Prevention and Early Intervention. P.15 http://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/335168/better_systems_better_chances_review.pdf

ARACY recommends:

- The development of a common approach to measuring outcomes to provide accountability and embed the measurement of effectiveness and building of evidence at all levels of the system,
- Data-driven local planning and commissioning, local approaches to needs assessment, service planning and resourcing,
- Building 'evidence ready' systems and using evidence to guide investment decisions and service provision,
- Developing shared values and a common approach to identifying needs and intervention thresholds, and processes and structures that enable and promote shared ways of working;
- Matching services to needs: assessment and planning processes that respond holistically to meeting the needs of children and families, and focus on building their capacity and working towards improved outcomes; and
- Key principles: grounding the system in the core principles of a holistic approach, strengths-based practice, working in partnership with families, and building capacity.

4.1. Recommendations

- That ARACY's principles for strengths-based practice, shared values and common approaches to risk assessment and early intervention working with families to build their capacity be embedded in domestic and family violence and early intervention systems.
- That the NSW government abolish short term funding cycles and create an environment where services want and can effectively work together.

5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

As the discussion paper acknowledges there is an unprecedented level of homelessness being reported in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and in combination with the rates of DFV in communities, there is an urgent and fundamental responsibility to address intersectionality. The *NSW Homelessness Strategy* needs to work with communities and help inform and drive the implementation of a NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy with a priority given to exploring the work undertaken in Aboriginal communities in relation to perpetration of violence. The Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy would intersect with a strong, well-resourced Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Network to develop consistent and evidence-based best practice initiatives to supporting Aboriginal women, families, men and communities impacted by violence and trauma.

AIHW in 2011 released a comprehensive report detailing the key areas to improve service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities *Effective practices for service delivery coordination in Indigenous communities*⁸. DVNSW notes the barriers identified are still prevalent throughout NSW in 2016 and have been compounded by the Going Home Staying Home reforms due to the perceived "mainstreaming" of the sector.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children escaping DFV need appropriate and safe housing options regardless of rurality in NSW. Housing stock in many Aboriginal communities in rural NSW is of a substandard quality, and is often overcrowded. Overcrowding can lead to a range of health and social issues and may in fact exacerbate tensions between couples or families, thereby heightening the risk of violence⁹. Overcrowding can also increase the risk of children being exposed to DFV. DVNSW therefore recommends that the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* address the issue of overcrowding in Aboriginal communities.

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *Effective practices for service delivery coordination in Indigenous communities*, December 2011, Accessed at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2011/ctgc-rs-08.pdf>

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, 2008.

5.1. Recommendation

- The *NSW Homelessness Strategy* must resource, support and respect Aboriginal communities to address the crisis of communities experiencing DFV and homelessness. The *NSW Homelessness Strategy* must address the issue of overcrowded houses in many Aboriginal communities, and provide adequate resources so that appropriate and safe housing can be provided to all Aboriginal people regardless of postcode or income.
- The *NSW Homelessness Strategy* needs to work with communities and help inform and drive the implementation of a NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy with a priority given to exploring the work undertaken in Aboriginal communities in relation to perpetration of violence. The Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy would intersect with a strong, well-resourced Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Network to develop consistent and evidence-based best practice initiatives to supporting Aboriginal women, families, men and communities impacted by violence and trauma.

6. Older Women

There is a rapidly increasing demographic of older women experiencing homelessness with a clear link to prolonged abuse exposure. DVNSW notes the Homelessness NSW and Older Women's Housing Group's publication of *A Plan for Change: Homes for Older Women*¹⁰, which recommends some innovative and flexible solutions for this cohort;

The NSW Government should commit to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the homelessness of older women. This should include setting clear targets and initiatives to be developed in consultation with older women and their representative organisations;

- The funding for the development of two new affordable housing projects for older women (one in regional NSW) which ensure at least 50 new rental units are delivered;
- Making the private rental sector a viable long term option for older women, including removing the capacity for 'no cause' evictions in the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW);
- Improving the way that the housing and homelessness service system responds to and supports homeless older women, including developing new products and services that target this cohort;
- Development of a targeted, mixed equity model for older women;
- Securing the financial independence of holder women including through improved access to superannuation and other financial assets.

6.1. Recommendation

- That the NSW Homelessness Strategy review and implement all recommendation from *A Plan for Change: Homes for Older Women* and specifically take into consideration the unique experiences of DFV for this cohort.

¹⁰ *A Plan for Change: Homes for Older Women*, Published by Homelessness NSW on behalf of the Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Group, accessed October 2016, <http://www.homelessnessnsw.org.au/images/stories/documents/Older_Women_Booklet_Web_Version.pdf>

7. Women with a disability¹¹

Women with disability are estimated to be 37.3% more at risk of domestic violence than their peers.¹² In NSW alone, 43% of the women who experienced personal violence in 2011 were estimated to have a disability or long-term health condition, 7% higher than the national average.¹³

Women with disability are vulnerable to violence due to a combination of gender and disability- based discrimination.¹⁴ The term 'intersectionality' is used to describe how discrimination based on gender and disability interact and result in unique experiences for women with disability. It is important that services respond to the needs of all women, not only those they have historically supported.

Women with disability experience domestic and family violence in a range of ways. However, the issues of power and control, as seen in domestic and family violence perpetrated against other women, are also present in domestic and family violence against women with disability. Some of the unique forms of domestic and family violence against women with disability, in addition to more familiar forms of domestic and family violence, include:

Physical Violence, such as the withholding of food, water, medication or support services, misusing medication as a restraint, using physical restraints and destroying or withholding disability-related equipment.¹⁵

Sexual Violence, such as inappropriate touching during care giving, taking control of reproductive processes and demanding sexual activities.

Emotional Violence, such as verbal abuse, forced isolation, denying or trivialising the disability, humiliating the individual, threatening violence, institutionalisation or the withdrawal of care, and threatening to hurt guide dogs, pets or other family members.¹⁶

Financial Violence, such as stealing or taking control of money, taking control of investments and refusing to pay for essential medication or disability-related equipment. Particular forms of coercion and manipulation that result from existing hierarchies between people with disability and people without disability, such as individuals being led to believe that all relationships function in this way.

Considering these often hidden ways women with a disability experience DFV it is pertinent to make sure that the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* takes into consideration the experiences of women with a disability who have accessed homelessness support and that these experiences are reflected in subsequent changes.

7.1. Recommendations

- Support of Universal Housing Design for all housing in NSW, and ensure the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* integrates service models appropriate for women and children with disability.

¹¹ Women With Disability and Domestic and Family Violence:

A Guide For Policy and Practice, People with Disability Australia and DVNSW, 2015

¹² ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics), 2012. '4430.0 – Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2012', Australian Bureau of Statistics. <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/A813E50F4C45A338CA257C21000E4F36?opendocument>>

¹³ Family and Community Services, 2014. 'Women in NSW 2014', NSW Government. <http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/_data?assets/file/0019/300772/3303_WNSW-Report2014_web.pdf>

¹⁴ Attard, M. and Price-Kelly, S., 2010. 'Accommodating Violence: The experience of domestic violence and people with disability living in licensed boarding houses', People with Disability Australia. <<http://www.pwd.org.au/documents/pubs/Accommodating%20Violence%20Report.pdf>>

¹⁵ Frohmader, C. 2007b. 'It's not ok, it's violence: information about domestic violence and women with disabilities', Women with Disabilities Australia. <http://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Its_Not_OK_Its_Violence.pdf>

¹⁶ Frohmader, C. 2007b:8

8. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer (LGBTIQ) communities

It is often difficult for a person experiencing domestic violence to seek support, information or advice for a myriad of complex reasons. For LGBTIQ people, barriers to access support can be compounded further. There are many misconceptions surrounding domestic violence and specifically LGBTIQ domestic violence, the limited existence and promotion of specialist LGBTIQ services, and the ongoing discrimination and marginalisation of LGBTIQ communities.¹⁷

Additionally it can be challenging for an LGBTIQ person to recognise that they are in an abusive relationship. For LGBTIQ people, “the challenge is heightened due to the dominant cisgender heterosexual discourse in domestic violence campaigns, publications and literature, and enduring ignorance towards domestic violence in relationships involving same gender attracted, transgender, gender diverse and intersex people.”

LGBTIQ people may fear or experience discrimination in attempting to access available crisis and temporary accommodation, even if these services believe that they are safe for LGBTIQ people.¹⁸

Community and chosen familial structures are particularly significant for LGBTIQ people, and inclusive, appropriate and culturally safe service delivery must reflect this unique cultural context and include the voice of LGBTIQ who have or are experiencing homelessness.

8.1. Recommendations

- That the NSW Government adopt the recommendations in the *Calling It What It Really Is* report (Appendix 1).

9. DFV survivors with no access to income

This group of women are not entitled to Centrelink benefits or work rights, or are unable to find paid work. In our experience, this cohort primarily includes women who have arrived as spouses or partners of skilled migrants, NZ residents who arrived after 2001 and other visa categories that have restrictions.

Women and children impacted by domestic and family violence with no access to an income rely heavily on the domestic and family violence and therefore the homelessness sector for support in NSW. The particular circumstances of these families often results in long stays in homelessness and domestic and family violence support accommodation with no exit options, which also prevents entry of new families to that service. In practice this means that crisis services have to make difficult decisions about the number of ‘no income families’ that they are able to support and is often dependent on the homelessness service’s access to transitional housing. It is a devastating challenge for victim survivors and the services that support them.

These women are incredibly vulnerable. In addition to the trauma resulting from domestic and family violence, women in this situation are often experiencing substantial distress due to language and cultural barriers, social isolation and, for some families, the impacts of post-traumatic stress disorder from events experienced in their country of origin. There are fears of police, government institutions and authorities, often the perpetrator has threatened that if they seek help they will be deported and that no-one will believe them. There are a number of challenges associated with finding a support service that understands the complexities of their experience and can assist.

Supporting survivors of domestic and family violence in navigating the complexities of Centrelink and Immigration rights and entitlements is very difficult and time consuming work which requires detailed understanding of the systems and trauma-specialist skills. Many mainstream and specialist services are unable to assist due to the particular challenges inherent in the nature of this work and the lack of specific funding for this cohort. There are some migrant and settlement services funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide specialist casework

¹⁷ Calling it what it really is, LGBTIQ Domestic and Family Violence Interagency and the Centre for Social Research in Health, University of NSW.

¹⁸ ACON Family Violence project, 2011

in this area however, these services cannot usually provide accommodation and may not always be accessible to women, particularly when they are in regional areas.

Access to safe accommodation is a major challenge for this cohort of families. Information is limited around what support programs are available, and already overstretched services often struggle to navigate the system. While a client is waiting for the Department of Immigration to process a change in visa status, she has no access to income. Anecdotal evidence from services suggests that the processing of the paperwork for this takes approximately 12 weeks on average. During this period, while the woman has no access to income she must rely almost entirely on the support service for accommodation, food and other basic amenities. This places additional pressure on services that rarely have access to these types of resources for this client cohort.

DVNSW recommends that the NSW Government advocate with the Commonwealth to improve the interactions of these highly vulnerable women and their families with the Centrelink system and ultimately assist them to a more rapid recovery. The entitlements of an individual are often difficult to understand and interpret and the information on the Centrelink website is not easy to understand for both clients and their advocates. Information and advice given by Centrelink may conflict with that given on the Australian Government's *Guide to Social Security Laws* and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection websites. Linkages between Centrelink and the homelessness sector are required – particularly with staff who have experience in migration and visa systems in each district as specialist homelessness service staff do not have the expertise to interpret complex policy interactions. The homelessness sector have indicated their willingness and desire to work with Commonwealth colleagues to find the best outcome for clients.

These specific recommendations come from work undertaken in partnership with the FaCS Homelessness Unit and through forums with domestic and family violence services and partner organisations such as the Immigrant Advice and Rights Centre who work frequently with women who have no access to income to help improve their lives. We have attached some case studies to highlight failures and successes and the intersectionality of homelessness, DFV and no income.

9.1. Recommendations

- A consistent, coordinated approach and protocols for working with no income/no visa clients with clear guidelines for client advocates and families on accessible assistance. Due to the complex nature of migration law and challenges relating to the navigation of support pathways for victims of DFV, a coordinated approach with clear guidelines on how to elicit assistance is urgently required. There should be clear policy and advice on the support available for visa applicants experiencing domestic and family violence in all circumstances. Where applicants do not have access to documents that evidence a genuine relationship, there needs to be a consistent and flexible approach to accepted alternative forms of evidence.
- That the NSW Government adequately resource services that support women with no access to income, as they often are solely reliant on their local SHS service for all of their living costs.
- That the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* address the challenges women with no access to an income face and their vulnerability to homelessness. DVNSW asks that the NSW government advocates with the Federal Government to allow for these women to access an income so that they do not become another DFV or homeless statistic.

10. Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

The *NSW Homelessness Strategy* must include targeted homelessness responses to culturally and/or linguistically diverse (CALD) victim-survivors of DFV. There are multiple well-evidenced barriers to accessing emergency accommodation, long-term housing and supports for CALD women, children and young people experiencing DFV.

There are also limited numbers of homelessness services that have comprehensive and culturally diverse models

of services that include bi-lingual staff and cultural understanding and sensitivity. As mentioned previously, there can be additional issues and complications if visa conditions mean a victim-survivor cannot work. This places a significant amount of pressure upon the support services and many are unable to adequately support their clients. DVNSW recommends that in consultation with experts across the sector there is an urgent need to develop culturally appropriate and targeted responses to CALD women, children young people and communities.

10.1. Recommendations

- That the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* implement culturally appropriate and targeted responses to CALD women, children, young people and communities, including providing additional resources to the specialist DFV services and programs that work specifically with CALD women.
- That the NSW government commit to providing all resources relating to homelessness and DFV in a range of languages and that all services receive training and ongoing professional development about working with CALD communities.

11. Pets, homelessness and DFV

DVNSW members regularly speak to victim-survivors whose pets are threatened or hurt by violent partners or family members. In intimate partner violence, threats or acts of violence upon a pet are used as a means of exerting control, and often are used as a means of keeping someone in a violent relationship. Children in particular are likely to bear the impact of leaving a home, furthermore, moving without their pets at this time compounds the stress and sense of loss and makes the trauma they are facing in their family life that much more intense, as well as exposing them to the normalisation of animal cruelty.

A 2014-2015 NSW based study by DVNSW and Dr. Lydia Tong from the University of Sydney's Faculty of Veterinary Science¹⁹, found 70 per cent of women escaping violent homes also report pet abuse. In the US, where acts of cruelty against animals are now counted alongside felony crimes like arson, burglary, assault, and homicide in the FBI's expansive criminal database, it is becoming far clearer to see the links that domestic violence perpetrators who also abuse pets are more dangerous, they have increased rates of physical and sexual violence and stalking, and are more likely to kill their partners²⁰.

The agonising decision to leave a violent relationship is amplified if victim survivors do not have the ability to take their pet with them. The relationship and bond with companion animals for women and children can be a positive therapeutic connection that needs to be retained where possible.

Places available in refuges for victim survivors of DFV are scarce, add a pet or multiple pets and the chances of being able to find a vacancy become more challenging. DVNSW notes there are more options for victims to remain with their pets as demonstrated by a number of member services who have adapted their accommodation to be able to provide support to victims and their pets. In addition, the *Safe Beds for Pets* program is run by the RSPCA, which offers housing for pets of people seeking refuge from domestic violence at all 10 RSPCA shelters, the safe beds program is not a long-term solution to the housing of the pet, but it gives domestic violence victims peace of mind and allows them to secure their own safety and make arrangements for the future.

Further research is essential because we need to have a much clearer picture of the connections between domestic and family violence and the abuse of animals. Building a solid evidence base in this area will assist policymakers, domestic and family violence services and people working with animals to better respond to the needs of women and children with pets who are experiencing violence and are afraid to leave.

¹⁹ Dr Lydia Tong, Daily Telegraph, August 29, 2016 , accessed November 5th 2016<<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/penrith-press/care-available-for-fourlegged-friends-of-abused/news-story/169b7c726cdd589010cdda2b858fb97d>>

²⁰ Tracking Animal Cruelty FBI Collecting Data on Crimes Against Animals, accessed November 5th 2016 <<https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/-tracking-animal-cruelty>>

Safe Beds for Pets, accessed 7th November 2016<<https://www.rspcansw.org.au/our-work/programs-community-services/safe-beds-for-pets>>

11.1. Recommendations

- The *NSW Homelessness Strategy* to review and explore a myriad of ways to support domestic and family violence services to be able to accommodate pets
- Further research into the links between pet abuse and domestic and family violence

12. Perpetrator Accommodation

There is currently no consistent referral pathway or service access in NSW for perpetrators of domestic and family violence. Both the Men's Referral Service and NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network (MBCN) identify significant gaps in funded programs and practitioners working to the minimum standards for behaviour change work in our state. When offenders come before the courts and are listed as 'low/medium' risk or when 'no offence' is recorded there is often very little action taken.

Although we now have protocols for NSW Police and other agencies to refer men to accredited Men's Behaviour Change Programs, there are still not an adequate number of services that meet the minimum standards and serious capacity issues that compound the availability of programs. This results in men either being referred to individual practitioners who may have no or little training or experience in working with male perpetrators of DFV, a complete lack of service, or (best case scenario) referral to a long waiting list for a locally run program. Community awareness of and referral into Men's Behaviour Change Programs that meet the standards is patchy at best. Inexperienced non-specialist practitioners and community organisations may attempt to deal with domestic violence as a "family", "anger" or "couples" issue and unintentionally collude with the violence.

By removing a perpetrator from the home they share with a victim there is potential for them to be at risk of homelessness. This provides services with the opportunity to not only work closely with the perpetrator in a behaviour change capacity but to address the risk of homelessness while minimising the further risk to the victim.

When a perpetrator is leaving custody it dramatically escalates the risk to the victim and services have shared stories of collusion and power and control being exerted while in prison to allow the perpetrator to continue to manipulate the victim. This can mean that even after being incarcerated for a DFV related offence the perpetrator can find their way back to live with the victim and reinforcing the cycle of abuse. DVNSW stresses the importance of coordination and integration of the NSW Homelessness Strategy with NSW Corrective Services around the release of perpetrators, a commitment to not release anyone into homelessness and support for victim-survivors if the perpetrator is released back to their address.

DVNSW highlight that Homelessness NSW recently held roundtables on supporting adults leaving custody and the priorities identified include:

- A review of crisis and long term housing options including an urgent review of FACS Housing policies to support adults leaving custody to access and maintain social housing; and investment in supportive housing options.
- Effective collaboration between SHS', NSW Corrective Services and FACS including adopting a collective impact approach.

12.1. Recommendations

- NSW Government should explore the success of established programs such as Breathing Space in Western Australia and consider options for short and medium term removal of perpetrators with wraparound behaviour change programs, trauma specialists and access to drug and alcohol programs in specialist perpetrator residential services.
- Partner support work to be recognised as a key element of specialist DFV service delivery and for resources to be allocated to women and children's services to develop this work.

- That the NSW Homelessness Strategy implement the recommendations from the Homelessness NSW People Leaving Custody Roundtable Report.

13. The voices of those homeless due to domestic and family violence

DVNSW highlight the need for the voices of women, children, young people and communities affected by DFV to have an integral role in the development of the NSW Homelessness Strategy. DVNSW reaffirm our commitment to support and facilitate the integration of victim's voices to the *NSW Homelessness Strategy* with our member services.

14. National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH)

14.1. Recommendation

- The NSW Government treat the extension of the NPAH as a matter of urgency and continue to pursue its extension with the Commonwealth Government
- The NSW Government rewind plans to introducing tenancy bonds for new public housing tenancies. If this recommendation and its underpinning principles are ignored that an exemption is created for those escaping domestic and family violence.

15. Conclusion

DVNSW notes that the themes within the discussion paper are a culmination of 40 years and more of knowledge, expertise and learnings of failures to properly resource and adequately support the intersectionality between domestic and family violence and homelessness. We have significantly consulted with the DFV and homelessness sectors in preparing this submission. We are keenly aware of the significant systemic barriers that hinder services from being able to support those at risk of, or are currently, homeless. Despite vast improvements being made in terms of openly discussing DFV and a successful public awareness campaign – much improvement is needed to enable the sector to effectively support women and children impacted by DFV.

DVNSW is optimistic that this strategy represents an opportunity to fundamentally shift our responses for those at risk of, and currently experiencing domestic and family violence, ensuring they don't have to experience homelessness on top of the life altering trauma associated with domestic and family violence. We commend the work of the Homelessness Strategy team and the Premier's Council on Homelessness in creating a process for the sector to have input into improvements for victim-survivors, families, communities and perpetrators of violence in NSW. We forward to working in partnership with the NSW Government, the DFV and homelessness sectors and all stakeholders to create a vibrant, relevant and effective Homelessness Strategy for NSW.