

*Review of Minimum Standards and Development of  
the Men's Behaviour Change sector in NSW.*

**Domestic Violence NSW submission to the  
NSW Government, Department of Justice**



## 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, youth 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, 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 Blueprint. 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.

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## Introduction:

Domestic Violence NSW welcomes the opportunity to make a formal written submission to the NSW Government's review of the minimum standards and development of the men's behaviour change sector in NSW. As the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence and women's services in our state, we work closely and collaboratively with DVNSW members, broader networks of specialist practitioners and government colleagues to encourage participation of service users, mainstream and specialist support providers, communities and stakeholders with an interest in improving responses to domestic and family violence in our state and to produce submissions that reflect the diversity of the sector and our communities.

The growing profile of survivor advocates such as Rosie Batty, mainstream media interest, increased reporting to police and political interest have all contributed to a much better understanding of the prevalence, nature and impacts of domestic and family violence (DFV) in Australia in recent years. An unprecedented spotlight has been focused on issues of sexual, domestic and family violence, particularly in the last two years. Community awareness of domestic and family violence is now significant, widespread and more nuanced. It is timely therefore, to reflect on what works in the current men's behaviour change 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 improving work with those who use violence.

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 perpetrators of domestic and family violence that will work for every community in NSW, even if limitless resourcing were to be available. Perpetrator intervention work is challenging, sophisticated and constantly reflexive and requires ongoing intergenerational community and government commitment. 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 effectively challenges the roots of violence supportive attitudes. DVNSW proposes that there are some basic principles that should underpin behaviour change approaches to domestic and family violence policy and practice in NSW:

- That all NSW citizens should be able to access timely, well-resourced, evidence-based domestic, family and sexual violence support responses located in their communities that are best practice, client-centred, trauma-specialist, culturally-safe and are based on the premise that DFV is a gendered crime and a violation of human rights.
- That significant long-term investment in NGO and government agency responses is required to develop a range of appropriate behaviour change interventions that interconnect and complement evidence-

based domestic, family and sexual violence prevention, early intervention and crisis initiatives and strategies including whole of school prevention and community-based behaviour change interventions which challenge entrenched gender inequality and violence-supportive attitudes whilst considering contributing factors such as homophobia, racism and discrimination.

- That any response developed to work with people who use violence must prioritise safety in the most meaningful sense for members of that family and their community. Risk and safety assessment for those impacted by the violence of an abusive family member is an ongoing, constantly evolving concept that must encompass analysis of a number of factors significantly broader than immediate physical security. This work is sophisticated and nuanced and requires specialists who have ongoing support, workforce development and supervision.
- That just as one size does not fit victim-survivors of violence, so perpetrators of violence also require a spectrum of interventions. Access to evidence-based interventions should not be postcode-dependent. International evidence across a range of cohorts of perpetrators of violence shows that group based programs may not work for all but a range of interventions must be considered if we are going to make perpetrators responsible for their choice to be abusive.

DVNSW has given feedback to government on the existing standards through a number of fora to date. We have member services that are already delivering programs that meet the standards and many more who have indicated that they are interested in being part of future work. We have sought feedback from mainstream and specialist DFV services and networks across NSW over the last twelve months in relation to access to men's behaviour change programs and interventions as part of our work with the broader domestic and family violence and women and families service sector. We have not attempted to respond to the questions in the paper where we do not have expertise but have left this to the practitioners who undertake the work and are more qualified to comment in detail. We look forward to continuing work with the NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network and its members, No To Violence and NSW Government on the development of this important area.

**Operation of the standards:**

Standards already exist in a range of jurisdictions where work is undertaken with victim-survivors of sexual assault, domestic and family violence and women's health. Domestic Violence NSW is in the process of scoping the feasibility of introducing both minimum and best practice standards in relation to domestic and family violence service provision with services throughout the state.

The Respect standards and accreditation system in the UK, Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations on the exploration of a range of models for perpetrator interventions and New Zealand's recent commitment to use David Mandel's Safe and Together model for a holistic approach to domestic and family violence response, early intervention and prevention all offer models for us in relation to perpetrator interventions in NSW.

We believe that the MBCP minimum standards, delivery of service or therapeutic based interventions and any corresponding accreditation system must closely complement and work with any standards for service provision to victim-survivors of violence. Government investment in programs must continue to be tied to adherence with the minimum standards but government may not necessarily be the most appropriate body to accredit programs or oversee operational models particularly as the field grows and develops.

The current set of standards and model for delivery of programs present a number of issues for the operation of MBC interventions outside urban centres in NSW. Given that the area of practice is rapidly changing, we propose consideration and the piloting of a range of interventions that have had some level of evaluated success in other jurisdictions to determine what works best in our community contexts. As with other work in the field of domestic and family violence, delivery of effective behaviour change interventions and best practice support for victim-survivors is likely to be highly dependent on existing networks and partnerships between mainstream and specialist service providers in any geographical region.

Minimum standards should apply to both government and NGO programs. Substantial work needs to be undertaken with womens' and domestic and family violence services, local DV interagencies and communities to ensure that the work of MBC practitioners and programs and the principles of safety, accountability and professional practice are fully understood. Community-based specialist NGOs (with expertise on their local populations) urgently require adequate resourcing to undertake this important work.

**Accessibility:**

In the work we have undertaken with the service sector in diverse communities throughout NSW over the last twelve months, we have identified a number of DFV networks that have expressed an interest in working with government and NGO MBC experts to design effective models that will adhere to the principles and allow delivery in non-urban and diverse contexts. There are a number of potential models that could address the access and scope issues identified in the discussion paper.

We propose that rather than making all programs and interventions meet the current or revised standards, a longer-term strategic development process is undertaken. Firstly, the current review of the 2012 standards for men's behaviour change programs is completed. Secondly, that expert organisations (No To Violence and the NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network) that have specialist experience delivering MBCPs are resourced to work with a diverse range of communities and community based organisations to scope the feasibility of new, culturally-safe interventions based on emerging practice in other jurisdictions. As the domestic and family violence peak body we would strongly support and welcome being a part of a joint NGO/government co-design advisory process with a long term remit to explore appropriate options to deliver effective interventions in communities across NSW.

The current standards and practice manual include GBTIQ men, men of diverse cultures and ethnicities and Aboriginal men, however we are aware that few programs are in reality accessible to all men. A number of providers have been trialling various methods to make MBCPs more accessible to diversity with varying degrees of success. This was the case prior to the standards being introduced in 2012 in NSW. Just as community-based expert organisations require resourcing to support and develop new ways of working with victim-survivors of intimate partner violence, so they need funding to work with the NSW MBCN and NTV to begin delivering community-specific programs and interventions that meet the standards and principles.

Again, we can look to community-based programs and interventions in other jurisdictions – for example women's services working with Aboriginal men who use violence in Canada, LGB/T and Black and Minority Ethnic perpetrator research in the UK and Maori organisations using well-being frameworks to work with perpetrators in New Zealand. In Australia there are a number of Aboriginal organisations and community-controlled services that deliver healing and trauma programs which should be considered a part of the continuum of effective responses and interventions. Behaviour change programs should be part of a suite of complementary coordinated case management responses that wraparound the perpetrator and their family.

**Evidence based practice and program effectiveness:**

At a national level, ANROWS has the remit and expertise to begin building a solid evidence base on the effectiveness of men's behaviour change programs and perpetrator interventions in Australia. Their perpetrator research stream grants and strategic connection to the sector through the ANROWS Practitioners Engagement Group which has representatives from a range of peak bodies (including NTV, DVNSW, DVVIC, EVAWQ) has begun to consider ways to ensure that knowledge transfer and exchange (KTE) from research to best practice is effectively transmitted.

In NSW, we require urgently resourcing for a peak body to ensure that KTE and design of future perpetrator interventions is undertaken strategically and to guide and deliver the design of ongoing training, sector development, ongoing evaluation of practice and programs and to build an evidence base on what works in the context of our service system. We strongly support the work that has been undertaken to date to build a strong evidence base by the NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network and No To Violence and we believe that both entities have substantial roles to play in the development of future perpetrator intervention work in our state.

**Program length and intensity:**

We are aware that there are a number of issues relating to the length and intensity of some of the current MBCPs in NSW (particularly the ten week programs) and that the delivery of effective interventions is dependent on a number of factors including access in a particular geographical area, number of available trained facilitators, resourcing, training and sector development as well as the capacity of specialist womens' and domestic and family violence services to provide ongoing support to the families of perpetrators of violence.

Ideally MBCPs would be longer than 10 weeks and delivered in a range of diverse, flexible contexts so that a groupwork program can be part of a suite of wraparound interventions and risk can be monitored on an ongoing basis whilst the perpetrator is engaged. Victoria is considering a continuum of interventions whereby MBCPs are one part of a number of coordinated responses as a result of the recommendations of the RCFV. We recommend that a similar strategic approach is considered here in NSW.

We are also aware that some men want to continue to access support in the longer term even once a program has been completed. We believe there is some merit in trialling a residential program (in conjunction with the Staying Home Leaving Violence model, for example) whereby violent men are removed from the family home and the family is supported. This could be similar to the Breathing Space model in Western Australia and the proposed residential program to be trialled in ACT and would offer more flexibility in terms of program length and delivery. Longer-term housing options for perpetrators could be attached to the intervention and the proposed GPS tracking trial could also be integrated into the model if it is delivered in an area that lends itself to the pilot.

**Workforce development & facilitators:**

As with all work in the domestic and family violence sector, effective behaviour change program delivery and work with perpetrators requires immense skill, specialist experience, a nuanced understanding of trauma, gender and cultural safety and substantial resourcing for ongoing training. Practitioners should be regulated and standards should apply to both MBCP facilitators and services supporting families. NSW Health's Education Centre Against Violence, Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia and No To Violence are all currently delivering high quality, best practice training on various related aspects to the NSW workforce. In the absence of a workforce development strategy or a peak funded to deliver specialised training it is recommended that these organisations be considered to jointly design and deliver training for the growing sector.

Given that we have recommended that MBCPs are part of a suite of interventions with perpetrators, a scale of training options could be designed that offer mainstream services and practitioners with an interest in the area a basic understanding of the dynamics of working with perpetrators of violence (concepts of accountability, safety, trauma for example) up to complex specialist training modules that qualified, experienced practitioners could access for ongoing professional development.

**Sector development:**

Men's Behaviour Change sector development and growth must to be considered in the broader context of domestic and family violence sector development in NSW. Currently there is no coordinated plan for mainstream or specialist DFV sector development, activities are usually delivered or contracted by government departments or individual providers at a local level and where there is coordination it is usually dependent on short-term projects undertaken by various peak bodies. There is a lack of coordination in relation to sector development across an increasingly diverse sector and it is challenging to develop coordinated responses when even government departments are unaware of the breadth of work being undertaken by practitioners and services across frontline crisis services, early intervention and prevention services, child protection, justice and Police.

DVNSW believes that there is an urgent need for funded systems advocacy and coordination of the MBC sector in NSW. A funded peak body would assist in the development of a healthy, integrated, sustainable sector that could undertake some or all of the functions outlined in the options section of the paper. Development of the peak body's functions could occur over a period of time as is the case in Victoria, the UK and other jurisdictions. We strongly support the NSW MBC Network's recommendations in relation to the options.