

Domestic Violence NSW

Feedback on the *Draft Practice Standards for Men's Domestic Violence Behaviour Change Programs in NSW*

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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 program providers 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
- Youth services

DVNSW members are 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 improvement and innovative, evidence-based policy responses to domestic and family violence through building workforce capacity and representation at all levels of government. We provide policy advice to multiple departments in the NSW Government on prevention, early intervention and response. We work with communities and the media to increase awareness and improve policy and practice responses on a number of state and federal advisory bodies including the NSW Premier's Council on Homelessness, the NSW Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Council, the NSW Early Intervention Council, the NSW Reference Group for Men's Behaviour Change, ANROWS Practitioner Engagement Group and the Australia Women Against Violence Alliance. 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 families and share their expertise with us. We pay tribute to those who have experienced domestic or family violence and to advocates, our colleagues and partners in government and non-government agencies who are working to improve responses in our state.

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/>

Contents

DVNSW	2
Introduction and context	4
Core principles.....	4
Gendered analysis and language	5
Diversity, cultural safety and accessibility	5
Increased investment in specialist victim-survivor support services	6
DVNSW's comments on the draft principles	6
Principle 1 - The safety of victims and children must be given the highest priority	6
Principle 2 - Victim safety and perpetrator accountability are best achieved through a coordinated service response.....	7
Principle 3 - Effective programs must be informed by a sound evidence base and subject to ongoing evaluation	8
Principle 4 - Challenging domestic and family violence requires a sustained commitment to professional practice.....	8
Principle 5 - Men responsible for domestic and family violence must be held accountable for their behaviour .	9
Principle 6 - Programs should respond to the diverse needs of participants, victims and children	9

Introduction and context

Domestic Violence NSW thanks the NSW Department of Justice for the opportunity to comment on the *draft Practice Standards for Men's Domestic Violence Behaviour Change Programs*. As the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence support services, we have worked with our members, No To Violence and the NSW Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) Network to contribute to the review of the existing standards. DVNSW and our member services have a strong interest in advocating for accredited behaviour change interventions that meet quality standards, respond to emerging international best practice and are inclusive, safe and accessible. We recognise that with growing awareness of domestic and family violence there is increasing pressure to allow more services and practitioners to implement behaviour change programs and interventions and ensure delivery throughout NSW. The review is timely and offers new opportunities for NGO expertise to be valued and embedded in this emerging area of practice.

We welcome the NSW Government's focus on perpetrator accountability and look forward to continuing to work with our government partners in their commitment to ensure that the safety of the partners and families of those who use violence is at the centre of all responses to domestic and family violence. Expansion of perpetrator programs, services and interventions will require substantial investment and respectful co-design partnership approaches that recognise the expertise of domestic and family violence specialists and women's services. As indicated in our previous input to the review of the standards, we believe that MBCP practitioners and group work should address and include all forms of domestic and family violence, including elder abuse, sibling abuse and adolescent violence. Effective work with men who use IPV is nuanced and complex and practitioners require substantial ongoing clinical supervision to ensure that they do not collude with perpetrators. We also note the proposal to include a Risk, Needs, Responsiveness model as part of the practice standards review. This represents a new way of working for the NSW sector and will require both ongoing training and support for practitioners within the domestic and family violence service sector as well as significant investment in other community based services such as mental health and AOD.

It is essential that resources are allocated to ensure that client safety and wellbeing outcomes are evaluated throughout the life of programs and interventions (both immediate and long term). We note that the UK's Project Mirabal marked a turning point in men's behaviour change work through its evaluation of victim-survivor perceptions of improved safety and behaviour change in violent offenders over a five-year period. An embedded, whole of government approach to domestic and family violence with closer coordination between government and non-government agencies is required if the work in this space is to improve safety and accountability.

Core principles

Our comments and recommendations are based on the following evidence and principles:

Gendered analysis and language

Police and court data, and the ABS's Personal Safety Survey, demonstrate unequivocally that violence is a gendered issue in terms of frequency, perpetration, ongoing effects and likelihood of victimisation. In Australia, women are at least three times more likely than men to experience violence in a domestic relationship and at least one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner in Australia. 95% of all victims of violence, whether female or male, experience violence from a male perpetrator¹. This does not mean that men are never the victims of violence, or that women are not sometimes perpetrators. However, national and international prevalence data reveals a clear disproportionality along gender lines. Australian men's violence is a significant public health issue, a crime and a violation of human rights. The application of the NSW Practice Standards must recognise both the prevalence and the cultural context in which violence occurs in intimate partnerships in Australia. To reduce violence against women, programs must challenge historically and culturally entrenched beliefs, along with the social, political and economic structures, practices and systems that support violence. We hold concerns about the removal of references specifying that the primary victims of abuse and violence perpetrated by men who participate in MBCPs are women and their children, although we recognise that some men perpetrate abuse in LGBTIQ relationships and/or use violence against other male family members and that some women use violence in intimate partnerships. It must be noted that the vast majority of perpetrators are heterosexual, cisgender men inflicting violence upon their female partners or ex partners and we advise against the removal of gendered language or frameworks.

Diversity, cultural safety and accessibility

We note the lack of access to culturally-safe, accessible and LGBTIQ-inclusive behaviour change programs and we urge the NSW Government to develop and test cohort-specific appropriate and safe behaviour change intervention approaches through partnerships with accredited providers and community-controlled organisations. We also recommend exploring strategies to give mainstream programs a more intersectional approach ensuring accessibility and safety for diverse communities. The review of the standards and practice manual offer an opportunity to leverage international and Australian behaviour change sector expertise to create interventions where sexuality, intersex, gender diversity, ethnicity, language, Aboriginality, disability and intersectionality are opportunities for developing world best practice.

We recognise that there are significant challenges to ensuring that perpetrator work meets the standards and is also inclusive and responsive to sex and gender diversity. However there is a growing international research and practice evidence base that demonstrates that behaviour change interventions can be culturally-inclusive and safe for LGBTIQ people whilst maintaining a gendered analysis. The development

¹ Our Watch, 2015, <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/Understanding-Violence/Facts-and-figures>

of systemic recognition and responses to the violence that occurs in some non-heterosexual, non-binary intimate partnerships and a gendered analysis of DFV are not mutually exclusive. Donovan and Barnes work in relation to behaviour change work with LGBT perpetrators in the UK is of particular interest in this space. We also note that ANROWS has commissioned a number of programs exploring inclusive practice interventions with perpetrators from diverse cultures and recommend that future reviews of the standards and practice manual incorporate the learnings from this research.

Increased investment in specialist victim-survivor support services

DVNSW welcomes government investment in NGO delivery of men's behaviour change programs and professional workforce development through the NSW Education Centre Against Violence. Whilst it is essential that perpetrators of violence are able to access locally-based high quality programs that will hold them accountable for the consequences of their violence and work towards changing violent-supportive attitudes it is equally important that there is significant investment in the services that support victim-survivors of this violence. Whilst a number of NSW specialist homelessness services, integrated domestic and family violence support services, Staying Home Leaving Violence, WDVCS and mainstream services support women and families impacted by violent men who are engaged in men's behaviour change programs we are not aware that any DFV specialists are specifically funded to provide partner support. As more perpetrators are engaged in programs, investment in long-term specialist support for partners and ex-partners must match the scale of this expansion.

DVNSW's comments on the draft principles

Principle 1 - The safety of victims and children must be given the highest priority

DVNSW welcomes a more clearly defined focus on safety and safety planning, stronger emphasis on the risk to victim-survivors and the inclusion of the Safer Pathway model to align with the DVSAT. As outlined in Standard 1.7, it is vital that services ensure victim-survivors' wellbeing and safety are the paramount concern. Strong links and supportive partnerships between MBC providers and local specialist support services should be resourced to ensure that safety and wellbeing is a priority and a shared responsibility.

In relation to draft Standards 1.8 and 1.9 DVNSW supports NTV's recommendation that the Practice Standards are not the place to stipulate specific qualifications for the various role functions within MBCPs. Rather we would advocate for a separate practitioner registration scheme, where practitioners are required to be accredited on an ongoing basis through the peak body. This would offer a more flexible and rigorous approach to ensuring ongoing safety and quality in men's behaviour change practice. DVNSW is currently supporting No To Violence in their development of a practitioner registration framework for the NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network and perpetrator intervention sector. This work considers measures of practice competency and quality improvement as well as relevant qualifications and experience.

DVNSW sits on the recently formed Steering Committee that is developing units of competency for the Graduate Certificate in Men's Family Violence. We recommend that all practitioners are accredited through No To Violence to work in specific roles in accordance with key competencies that can be acquired either through accumulated qualifications and experience in the sector or through completion of specific units of competency within the Graduate Certificate currently being developed. Until a practitioner registration framework is developed and implemented, we recommend an interim membership criteria that reflects the high level of specialisation required to implement men's behaviour change work, whilst enabling the workforce to grow to better meet the demand on existing programs.

Work with perpetrators of violence is nuanced, complex and highly specialised. It requires considerable skill and expertise and reflective, well-supervised practice. NSW does not have a legacy of government-funded practice in the behaviour change space neither do we have a well developed, well resourced MBC workforce strategy. Specialist domestic and family practitioners are now more supportive of MBC work but there is still some significant work to be undertaken to create stronger, more integrated connections between parts of the support system.

We do not believe that 50 hours of supervised practice is not sufficient to ensure safe, effective and quality practice. Practitioners and programs should be required to demonstrate competence in a number of aspects of core domestic and family violence practice with men who use violence, which can be specified through previous experience, training, or a combination of both. As Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV) begins to deliver training, we recommend that the standards, supervision and practice manual are reviewed and updated to reflect increased availability, emerging best practice and increased expectations for specific professional training and qualifications for practitioners.

Principle 2 - Victim safety and perpetrator accountability are best achieved through a coordinated service response

DVNSW supports the revised Principle 2 and endorses collaborative, trauma-informed wraparound service provision as the cornerstone of good practice for all domestic and family violence practitioners. In a practical sense, this means working with a respect for difference and specialisation, in a coordinated and transparent way. Practitioners must ensure they are not working in isolation, must liaise regularly with key relevant agencies and attend relevant meetings, training and networking opportunities to continue to develop their practice. Strong collaborative relationships mean having mechanisms in place that encourage supportive referral processes and open up pathways and opportunities for staff to develop and maintain strong working relationships with other local agencies.

Principle 3 - Effective programs must be informed by a sound evidence base and subject to ongoing evaluation

DVNSW notes the new Standard under Principle 3 that focuses on evidence based practice, and recommends that program providers apply the Risk, Need, Responsivity (RNR) principles. DVNSW welcomes an increased focus on evidence-based practice and the need for providers to demonstrate the theoretical basis for the design and delivery of programs. The lack of data and widespread research around MBC programs in NSW and elsewhere may mean that this is challenging in some circumstances.

The inclusion of RNR model, whilst welcomed, would require significant training and the provision of resources to a number of parts of the non-government community service sector if it were to be implemented effectively. We recommend a whole of government commitment to implement such a model. For example, currently if a facilitator identifies a drug and/or alcohol problem with a group participant and seeks to refer him to receive treatment for this, there are currently lengthy waiting lists in NSW for AOD treatment and major service gaps are experienced in both urban rural and regional communities. The same applies to a perpetrator who requires accessible accommodation. To have an effective RNR model, a whole of government approach to the complexities and multiple issues experienced by perpetrators would have to be addressed with substantial investment in mental health, AOD and community-based health services.

DVNSW strongly recommends an increase in the minimum duration of programs and the number of hours of engagement with men both in the program and individually. Standard 3.3 should reflect contemporary international practice and evidence which rejects 12 week programs as being an inadequate length of time to engage men effectively. We recommend that the international standard for program length (between 20-48 weeks) is adopted. In addition we support NTV's recommendation for an increase in the number of contact hours required for group work to a minimum of 48. These hours would be in addition to the assessment process and the recommended minimum contact hours for individual wrap-around work and family contact work.

Principle 4 - Challenging domestic and family violence requires a sustained commitment to professional practice

DVNSW supports Principle 4, particularly the need for minimal training requirements to undertake formal group work.

DVNSW endorses the need for one male and one female co-facilitator of each program. We believe this should also apply to programs with LGBTIQ people.

DVNSW urges the NSW Government to ensure group facilitators for domestic and family violence support services receive the same high level of support through monthly or fortnightly clinical supervision and professional development as mandated in the MBC Standards.

Principle 5 - Men responsible for domestic and family violence must be held accountable for their behaviour

DVNSW supports Principle 5.

Principle 6 - Programs should respond to the diverse needs of participants, victims and children

DVNSW supports Principle 6; that providers should be able to demonstrate an understanding of and regard for the particular needs and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, LGBTIQ people, people with disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Cultural safety training and workforce development should be mandatory and regularly reviewed and updated. It is vital that facilitators undertake a thorough risk assessment with every participant to be aware of any safety issues that may present in group settings in relation to diversity.

DVNSW urges the Department of Justice to consider ways in which NSW men's behaviour change providers and practitioners might be resourced to create and formalise genuine partnership approaches with specialist domestic and family violence support services and community-controlled services working specifically with culturally-diverse cohorts so that group facilitators can develop nuanced and specialised practice with perpetrators from diverse communities.