



Mr Jonathon O'Dea MP
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

EFACS13/419

**Follow up to the Auditor-General's Performance Audits
October 2011-March 2012
Report No 218: Responding to domestic and family violence**

Dear Mr O'Dea *Jonathon,*

I refer to your letter dated 4 July 2013, regarding the Department of Family and Community Services' consolidated response to the Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report No 218, *Responding to domestic and family violence*.

In response to your request for further information, I am pleased to provide the following:

1a. Will changes to privacy legislation support information sharing between non-justice agencies and NGOs?

Yes, in particular circumstances this information sharing is supported by the legislative changes. There are two circumstances when this may occur.

- (i) Agencies, including public sector agencies, may collect, use or disclose relevant personal or health information at any time in domestic violence cases *if they reasonably believe it is necessary to do so to prevent or lessen a serious threat to the life, health or safety of a person*. This includes disclosure to and collection from non-government services.

The Department of Attorney General and Justice advises that non-government services will be subject to protocols relating to appropriate management of information.

- (ii) In cases where no serious threat to life, health or safety of a person has been identified, agencies and non-government support services may exchange information *where legal proceedings have been initiated, including an application for an apprehended domestic violence order or criminal charge, and the victim has given consent and the disclosure is necessary for the provision of domestic violence support*.

2a. Is there any information on the number of domestic and family violence referrals through HSNet?

As advised in my 1 May 2013 letter, Service Link provides an online service Directory within HSNet. The directory contains details of specialist and mainstream services and is available for use by both government and non-government service providers. It does not store information on how the directory information is used.

3a. The Audit Office has reinforced the importance of obtaining estimated costs of the impact of domestic and family violence on the operations of agencies. Are there any further strategies being developed to address this recommendation?

It is anticipated that the monitoring and evaluation of the Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Reforms will contribute to information about agencies' estimated operational costs. Further strategies will be developed during implementation of the Reforms.

4a. Could you elaborate on how the DFV Framework will be strengthening governance arrangements?

The Domestic and Family Violence Reforms will be supported by a governance framework which ensures accountability and reinforces whole of government and cross sector collaboration. This framework will consist of:

Domestic and Family Violence Ministerial Group

This Group meets on a quarterly basis and consists of:

- Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women (Chair)
- Attorney General
- Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
- Minister for Police and Emergency Services
- Minister for Health.

The Group's role is to:

- provide direction on high level domestic and family violence issues, including resource distribution and policy direction
- oversee the implementation of the DFV Framework, ensuring a consistent, whole of government / cross sector response
- build a shared understanding of the aims and planned outcomes of DFV service provision across NSW.

As Chair, The Hon. Pru Goward, the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women, will report annually to Parliament on the progress of DFV reform implementation.

NSW Domestic and Family Violence Council

A new Domestic and Family Violence Council is being established to provide professional advice on domestic and family violence to the Ministerial Group. Council members will include government and non-government experts.

It is anticipated that once the Council is established, it will hold its inaugural meeting at the end of August 2013.

Domestic and Family Violence Steering Committee

This Committee is established and comprises the senior executives of the NSW Government agencies which have responsibility for the implementation of the DFV Reforms. Their role is to consider proposals submitted by the Reforms Implementation Working Group and to ensure that their respective agencies are on track with planned strategies and targets.

DFV Reforms Implementation Working Group

The Working Group comprises representatives from the NSW Government agencies which have responsibility for the implementation of the DFV Reforms. Group members develop proposals which are submitted for the consideration of the DFV Executive Steering Committee.

Regional governance

One of the keys to the success of implementing the DFV reforms will be to ensure that there is coordination and oversight at the local level between government and non-government service providers.

Currently, local inter-agency / service coordination is undertaken by nine Region Domestic Violence Coordinators located within the NSW Police Force. Their role is to support government and non-government organisations in delivering local and regional responses to domestic and family violence.

In addition, there are 78 Local Domestic Violence Committees mostly comprised of non-government services (with some government agency input).

Options are currently under consideration to strengthen local and regional governance structures so that their roles more closely align with the outcomes to be achieved by the Domestic and Family Violence Reforms.

5. Could you provide the Committee with an update on the progress of the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Reforms announced by the Minister in June 2013?

Work on the planning and implementation of the Reforms is progressing well. Specific milestones and achievements are listed below:

- Consultation documents were published on the Have Your Say website on 25 June 2013. The consultation closes on 23 July 2013. A Cabinet Minute outlining the final version of the Reforms will be lodged with the Cabinet Standing Committee on Social Policy at the beginning of October.
- A final implementation plan will be developed for Cabinet consideration towards the end of 2013.
- The cross agencies implementation plan will take into account feedback on a public consultation and advice from government and non-government organisations.
- The Reforms Implementation Working Group met on 9 July 2013 to begin mapping out work required for implementation.

- FACS-Women NSW has developed a draft work plan for the initial implementation stages of the DFV Reforms. A number of issues are being resolved within FACS including:
- The DFV Funding Program was redesigned as part of the Reforms. The following grants have been awarded:
 - \$2M (over three years) to the Men's Referral Service (MRS) Inc to establish and operate the Men's Telephone Counselling and Referral Service.
 - \$400,000 to the Australian Institute of Family Studies Prevention Program Review and Evaluation to undertake two studies under the Violence Prevention Program Review and Evaluation.
 - \$220,000 to the University of Western Sydney (UWS) to undertake one study under the Violence Prevention Program Review and Evaluation.
 - All three studies will enhance domestic and family violence evidence based policy and planning.
 - \$60,000 to Legal Aid NSW to support an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) Defendant Pilot Project in Burwood.
 - \$31,700 to the Men's Behaviour Change Network (MBCN) via Baptist Community Services (BCS) to establish and operate the MBCN for 12 months.

There is a focus in this funding on prevention of domestic and family violence. The NSW Government is as committed to stopping violence in the home as it is to supporting its victims.

- Domestic and family violence sector capacity will be enhanced via a state-wide Domestic and Family Violence Skills Strategy funded at \$1.5M over three years. The Strategy will deliver training specifically designed to support the implementation of the Reforms, and will provide relevant qualifications for workers in the domestic violence sector.
- It is proposed that a time limited advisory committee be established to advise on future funding under the Prevention Partnership stream of the DFV Funding Program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further information on how the findings of the Auditor-General's Performance Audit are being addressed.

Yours sincerely


Jim Longley
Acting Director General

25/7/13