

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN
COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS**

Organisation: Domestic Violence NSW

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**Domestic Violence NSW submission to
Social Issues Committee
Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs**

Domestic Violence NSW Inc. (DVNSW) is the statewide peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services within NSW. DVNSW provides a representative and advocacy function for specialist domestic violence and family services and the women, children and communities they support, and is committed to facilitating and supporting ongoing improvement and good practice within specialist domestic and family violence services.

“Domestic violence is recognised as the single greatest preventable cause of death, ill health and disability for women aged under 45 in Australia”

NSW Auditor General's Report, Responding to Domestic and Family Violence, 2011

As the NSW peak body for specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services, Domestic Violence NSW works with a range of specialist and mainstream non-government organisations and government agencies supporting women as victim-survivors of intimate partner violence as well as child survivors of family and domestic violence. We also work with communities and community organisations that seek to address domestic and family violence at a local population level. Our role is to advocate for evidence-based best practice and policy responses to women, children, young people and communities impacted by domestic and family violence. We contribute at a state and federal policy level and work from the perspective that a gendered analysis of domestic and family violence based on human rights and social justice principles should be central to all domestic and family violence responses for women, children, young people and communities.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Social Issues Committee Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs. This submission works from the premise that all NSW communities have high social needs when considered from the perspective of domestic and family violence service provision. There are very few service networks in NSW that are comprehensively able to meet the needs of women and children and communities impacted by violence. If we are to do so then significant, long term investment in well-coordinated, co-designed government and non-government agency approaches is necessary.

“Domestic and family violence costs the NSW economy \$4.5 billion per annum”¹

¹ Women NSW 2014, *It Stops Here- A New Approach to Domestic Violence in NSW*, accessed on 10th August 2015<http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/news/items/it_stops_here_-_a_new_approach_to_domestic_violence_in_nsw>

Core principles for working with women, children and communities impacted by domestic and family violence

Domestic Violence NSW advocates from the premise that the essential principles at the core of effective responses to women, children and communities impacted by domestic and family violence should include and prioritise:

- Trauma-specialist approaches for both adult and child victim-survivors.
- Specialist child support workers who are skilled and experienced in working with child survivors of violence as clients in their own right.
- Safety and confidentiality for women, children and young people and other victim-survivors of violence.
- Survivor-centred approaches that ensure informed consent is continually at the core of all work practices and are responsive to the diverse needs of both adult and child survivors.
- Integrated, coordinated, cross-agency approaches that operate in the best interests of both adult and child survivors.
- Strengths-based approaches that respect and empower victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and their children.
- Recognition that domestic and family violence is a violation of human rights, a crime against the individual and impacts broadly on communities and the whole of society. Domestic and family violence is not just an individual or private problem.
- Recognition that domestic and family violence primarily impacts on women and their children.
- Flexible approaches that celebrate and include diversity and are committed to promoting access to and equity of services for all women, children, young people and communities impacted by DFV.
- Recognition that additional disadvantage and barriers are experienced by particular groups and that these communities are more vulnerable because they are less likely to seek help, identify family and domestic violence in their relationships, or may perceive that their needs might not be met by mainstream services or dealt with sensitively and in confidence.

Given the prevalence and impacts of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, we believe that all NSW citizens should expect to be able to access professional, tailored, specialist service responses located in their communities. Domestic and family violence services and specialist practitioners should prioritise trauma-specialist, culturally-safe and client-centered approaches. There is no “*one size fits all*” solution. Appropriate responses require sophisticated case planning and review, safety planning and specialist skills.

A Safer State: a blueprint to end sexual assault and domestic and family violence in NSW

DVNSW co-chairs the NSW Women's Alliance, a network of statewide and peak bodies working in sexual assault and domestic and family violence from feminist, human rights based, social justice perspectives.

Early in 2015, the NSW Women's Alliance prepared a blueprint for intergenerational change outlining a multi-pronged approach to service delivery, funding, policy development and investment.² The recommendations provide pathways to achieving sustainable positive outcomes for people affected by domestic and family violence, across the government and non-government sectors in NSW. The recommendations include a number of approaches relevant to the current inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs. More often than not, communities with high social needs have a high correlation of domestic and family violence rates. While reporting abuse and seeking support is increasing within all communities, the corresponding critical investment has not grown to meet the demand on all parts of the system.

NSW's specialist homelessness sector has gone through a major reform process within the last 18 months, *Going Home Staying Home*. The GSH reforms had an unprecedented impact upon the domestic and family violence sector and this submission focuses on lessons learnt in this process. It proposes that the NSW government must commit to a thorough, coordinated and sustained investment in the government and non-government service sector if we are to see a positive shift in NSW's domestic and family violence statistics.

We have included the relevant recommendations from *A Safer State* as they are relevant in considering coordinated responses for communities with high levels of social need. These fall into three broad categories:

1. Strong high-level messages from communities and government:

- The NSW Premier to drive a strong, sustained, coordinated prevention message that speaks to the diversity of communities affected by sexual assault and domestic and family violence and specifically acknowledges the impacts of violence on children and young people.
- A NSW Minister for the Prevention of Sexual Assault and Domestic and Family Violence and for the NSW Government to build on the research and examples of good practice identified through the Women NSW-commissioned AIFS Prevention studies.
- Development of a NSW Framework for responding to and preventing sexual assault which includes the impacts of sexual violence on children and young people and intergenerational trauma.
- Embedded, systematic opportunities for sexual assault and domestic and family violence peak organisations to work meaningfully with government to co-design reforms.

² NSW Women's Alliance, *A Safer State: A Blueprint to End Sexual Assault and Domestic and Family Violence*, accessed 11th August 2015, <<http://www.asaferstate.org.au>>

- Political and community leaders to demonstrate leadership and commitment by filming messages unequivocally condemning violence against a diverse range of women and children and making a clear public statement that violence against women and children is serious, a crime, a violation of human rights and will not be tolerated.
- Implementation of a long-term cross-departmental NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy driven by Aboriginal communities. The Family Violence Strategy must intersect with a strong, well-resourced Aboriginal Family Violence Network to develop consistent and evidence-based best practice initiatives.

2. Prevention and Early Intervention

- The adoption of a coordinated, long-term NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Plan including strategies that respond to diverse communities affected by sexual assault and domestic and family violence and strategies specifically addressing the diverse needs of children.
- Prioritisation of State and Federal Prevention Programs and research, including a commitment to ANROWS and Our Watch for the lifespan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.
- Interagency and intersectoral collaboration to ensure relevant strategic planning around program funding for Men and Boys' Violence Prevention, including NGO representation at all levels of design and evaluation.
- A regular review of the NSW Men's Behaviour Change minimum standards including accreditation and regular auditing for Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs) and expansion to include standards for one-on-one behaviour change counselling and programs. Review annually, and adapt as new research emerges. Accredited MBCPs to be funded adequately to ensure NGOs are able to deliver best practice and implement latest research recommendations, particularly in relation to the impacts of domestic and family violence on children.
- Embedding of evidence-based respectful relationship education that focuses on promoting gender equality and violence prevention. Evaluated respectful relationship education needs to target all sections of community and all ages, not only throughout the NSW school curriculum, but also in conjunction with sporting, recreation and community organisations.
- Development and investment in a NSW specific program based on the principles of Victoria's Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program, specifically education programs for women with disability about the nature of violence.
- Ongoing training to police, prosecutors, judicial officers, court staff, legal practitioners and other justice workers on risk assessment and management, the nature and dynamics of sexual assault and domestic and family violence and victims' experiences.

3. A well-resourced, sustainable service & support system that can respond effectively to women, children and communities impacted by DFV

- A minimum investment of \$100 million over the next 3 years in NSW's specialist domestic and family violence sector.
- Urgent expansion of funding for accessible, specialist, targeted, culturally safe, client-centered services that meet the health, housing, justice and legal needs of all women, children, young people and high risk communities including but not limited to:
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
 - Young women
 - Older women
 - Women with disabilities
 - Culturally and linguistically diverse and migrant women
 - Women living in regional, rural and remote areas
 - Women in prison and women exiting custody and
 - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex and queer people (LGBTIQ)
- Investment in the statewide roll out of *Safer Pathway* with adequate resourcing of all service providers to provide immediate and long-term, trauma-specialist support to women and their children experiencing domestic and family violence.
- Increased protections and support for women and children escaping abusive relationships whose private tenancies or mortgages are compromised.
- Investment in a statewide expansion of the *Staying Home Leaving Violence* program to ensure coverage across NSW.
- Adoption of the Shelter NSW target; “*within 10 years making 100,000 more rental properties available to low income household at affordable rents*”.
- Increased appropriate support options for LGBTIQ people impacted by sexual assault and/or domestic and family violence
- Increased legal assistance funding, including specialist women’s legal services and other legal services that provide gender and culturally safe trauma-specialist sexual assault and domestic and family violence expertise.
- All agencies working with women and children impacted by sexual assault and/or domestic and family violence to be resourced and supported to work in trauma-specialist, culturally safe, client-centred and gendered frameworks.
- NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team to meet and publicly report regularly. Where recommendations of the Committee are not implemented, the NSW Government should give reasons for not doing so. The recommendations should inform NSW reforms intersecting with sexual assault and domestic and family violence including child protection.
- Research into the effectiveness of trauma-specialist psychosocial interventions for women who experience violence. Use of this research should inform subsequent policy and practice particularly in relation to the impacts of trauma and violence on children and young people.

Domestic and Family Violence service coordination in NSW

Service coordination and distribution in the domestic and family violence sector is a primary concern for the peak body and our membership.

Key issues underpinning and contributing a number of significant and fundamental barriers to clients accessing coordinated services responsive to their needs include:

1. Concurrent government initiatives and reforms in various stages of implementation that lack coordination across communities and service structures.

DVNSW acknowledges that improvements in service delivery sometimes require a major reform process. However evidence also demonstrates that for major reforms to be successful they need to be adequately funded and have clearly articulated, transparent, independent and ongoing process and outcomes evaluations as well as timely reporting. These aspects need to be present not just during policy and procedure development but also throughout implementation.

There are multiple government initiatives and reforms in various stages of implementation aimed at reducing the prevalence of domestic and family violence and delivering better services using tailored, client-centred approaches that meet the diverse needs of clients from all communities. Too often reforms are developed in isolation and with varying degrees of input from non-government agencies and the sector that they will impact.

In the last 3 years in NSW, we have had substantial reforms to child protection, justice and policing, the specialist homelessness service sector and victim support. Reforms processes must be aligned and responsive to input from the sector at all stages of design and implementation if we are to close substantial gaps between government and non-government responses identified in the 2011 NSW Auditor General's report.

The 2012 NSW Parliament's Inquiry into Domestic Violence Trends and Issues³ made 89 recommendations to improve responses and ensure better coordination between government and non-government agencies working with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. Some of the issues identified have been addressed in the NSW Government's 2014 *It Stops Here* domestic and family violence strategy. A substantial number are yet to be implemented.

Safer Pathway, a key element of *It Stops Here* aims to identify and respond to women and children who are most at risk and to provide a multi-agency response similar to the UK's MARAC model. In two test sites in Orange and Waverley there are now clearer support pathways for the referral of victim-survivors. Despite *It Stops Here* and *Safer Pathway* being developed by the NSW Department for Family and Community and Services at the same time there was a lack of coordination between the two sets of reforms.

³ New South Wales Parliament, Legislative Council, 2012, Standing Committee on Social Issues, *Domestic violence trends and issues in NSW*, accessed 12th August 2015
<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parliament/committee.nsf/0/2340ACAD17F1E8C4CA257A6700149EFD>

Whilst the specialist homelessness service sector funding and service delivery model was being reformed under *Going Home Staying Home* (including the state's domestic violence refuges and services), another set of reforms which would inevitably increase pressure on the already stretched system was also being developed. Both sets of reforms required substantial input and a commitment to new ways of working from the NGO sector. The spirit of the reforms was to foster closer partnerships between government and non-government agencies but the consequence of implementing two sets of reforms at the same time has been confusion, a lack of understanding about agency responsibility, fractured relationships which will take some time to rebuild and the loss of significant specialisation in some areas.

At the beginning of the *Going Home Staying Home* (GHS) reform process, much of the service sector supported the principles and intentions of the reforms, however the rushed nature of many key parts of the process and a negative media campaign led to a number of unintended outcomes. By late 2014, the public and, in particular, women impacted by violence heard a dangerous message that NSW refuges had closed and that they no longer had anywhere to seek support.

The implementation of the GHS reforms resulted in major upheaval for the sector. This was partly as a consequence of the implementation timeframes, which resulted in poor planning, change and transition that happened too quickly, a lack of transparency in tender processes and decisions and a changed service delivery environment. Issues included:

- Drawn out competitive tendering process with significant changes in tendering principles before and after the announcement of the tender results
- Inconsistent distribution of DFV services in different districts
- Errors in or changes to the final contracts
- Lack of housing stock and exit points from the crisis system in many districts
- Confusion and inconsistencies in direction relating to the Service Support Fund, Inner City restoration funding and allocation of NPAH funding
- Confusion and inconsistent messaging in different FaCS districts
- A lack of understanding about the specialised nature of the work and responses required when working with communities impacted by domestic and family violence and trauma
- Fractured local relationships between government and non-government services.

Impacts of the GHS reform process were further compounded by the introduction of new accountability measures and the embedding of new systems including CIMS and Link2Home as well as increased demand for Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) and an overall increase in homelessness in NSW.

GHS resulted in significant change and trauma for the sector and the sector needs time to settle into the new environment and to be given opportunity to embed the reform principles into its service delivery. Whilst the spirit of many of the reforms (including GHS) was welcomed by the sectors impacted, reform processes often don't do enough to address significant gaps and deficits in resourcing, service provision, prevention and early identification.

Even after the GSH reforms and introduction of *Safer Pathway*, victim-survivors still have to navigate heavily silo-ed parts of the system and struggle to access services across various agencies. Clients commonly encounter services with a limited understanding of complex trauma, inappropriate responses to cultural diversity and a lack of institutional understanding about the lived impacts of domestic, family and sexual violence.

“The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (2013) Agreed Conclusions: “Eliminating and preventing violence against women and girls show that few countries worldwide have undertaken the multi-sectoral and sustained approaches deemed necessary for effective prevention””⁴

United Nations, 2013

2. Impacts of competitive tendering on the NSW domestic and family violence sector and the price of competition for NGOs.

The competitive tendering approach of GSH created significant trauma, change and turmoil both within Family and Community Services (FaCS) and throughout the non-government service sector. We strongly recommend that any further rounds of procurement or reform use strengths-based approaches, recognising the value of specialisation and expertise and prioritising stability for clients and good service provision. Options for procurement need to be identified transparently and agreed with the sector well before the end of funding periods. Any decisions that are unequivocal (including district budget and resource allocation models and tender processes) should be co-designed by government and the sector and communicated as early as possible so that services can plan and build strong, appropriate locally-based joint working arrangements and partnerships which will be sustainable.

The notion of competitive tendering in a resource restrictive community sector is destabilising and impacts negatively on the positive work fostered at a local level and through state capacity building processes. Asking services to collaborate and work together and then compete for relatively small amounts of funding is an unnecessary and demoralising strategy that increases negative tension in carefully balanced and managed local relationships.

Service boundaries, historical conflicts, financial competition, the pressure of day to day service workloads, the challenging nature of working with clients impacted by violence and trauma and deeply entrenched sector held beliefs about how agencies or individual workers operate or should operate, dampen efforts to promote communication and effective collaboration. These factors should not be impacting negatively on the safety of women, children, young people and communities affected by domestic and family violence.

⁴ United Nations 2013, Handbook For National Action Plans on Violence Against Women, accessed 13th August 2015, < <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/handbook-for-nap-on-vaw.pdf>

3. A shared vision to promote gender equity and challenge the causes of violence against women and girls in all NSW communities.

It is now generally accepted that violence against women is directly linked to deeply entrenched social beliefs that support and promote gender inequality. Barriers to gender equity, which are at the core of violence supportive attitudes, require tailored messages appropriate to their audience and community. Strong, clear, unequivocal messages condemning gender inequality from a range of political, community, faith and sporting leaders are essential to raise the issue of violence against women and children as serious, prevalent and preventable. Services must work with communities to ensure messages are consistent and coordinated. All communities in NSW have a responsibility to tackle the structures that condone violence against women and girls. Community leaders and Elders are often most appropriate for this role. A number of culturally diverse communities are already doing significant work in this area. Sophisticated understandings about prevention and early intervention in specific communities, particularly high-risk communities with elevated rates of domestic and family violence must be integrated into service delivery and campaign-planning for tailored prevention responses if we are to effectively challenge violence in the longer term.

However, the reality of fostering a shared understanding that works across the diversity of communities can be very difficult with a myriad of myths about domestic and family violence presented as facts, including widespread victim-blaming and a lack of understanding about the gendered nature of violence. These beliefs are often held and perpetuated by communities and sometimes reinforced by organisations servicing them. Services, government agencies, schools and communities must have coordinated, highly nuanced responses and shared values when it comes to challenging domestic and family violence.

“Success is evidenced by leadership; a long-term shared vision, systematic data collection, a collaborative approach and alignment between the locality and the broader policy environment. Policy makers need approaches that develop trust, stimulate relationships and support consultation, innovation, local decision making and long-term commitment”

Centre for Community Child Health, Place Based Initiatives 2013⁵

4. Domestic and family violence referral pathways in NSW are unclear and there are major gaps in service provision.

Referral pathways are often unique to an individual community. A client’s support intensity, duration and availability is almost always impacted by service availability and type in a particular geographical location. We can establish ideal referral pathways through policy, resourcing and protocols but in reality, effective referral will be determined by the quality and nature of the relationship between local services and the knowledge that appropriate support exists.

The move towards localisation of service delivery in NSW’s FaCS districts is a step towards place-based planning and improved local coordination however; this in itself can be fraught with issues. The reality is that in 2015 in NSW a women and her

⁵ The Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne, Centre for Community Child Health, Place-based Initiatives, accessed 7th August 2015, >http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/CCCH_Place-based_initiatives_report.pdf<

children in one area of the state may receive a comprehensive support response under *Safer Pathway* but in another area equivalent services and structures are not in place. This ultimately increases the risks around domestic violence-related homicide, ongoing abuse, the risk that a woman will return to the violence and further trauma. The inconsistency in distribution of services, support models and availability of safe accommodation options across NSW results in vastly inconsistent responses for vulnerable clients.

“the challenge [is] maintaining consistency and a level of fidelity while providing flexibility and responsiveness and enabling communities to be involved in planning and ‘owning’ local services within the guidance of a strong evidence-based framework. If we get this right then it is more likely that there will be sustainable differences to outcomes for children and families.”

Centre for Community Child Health, Place Based Initiatives 2013⁶

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 very few exist that meet the minimum standards. 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, or 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.⁷

5. Quality service coordination requires sustained and strategic investment.

A range of incidents have occurred where there have either been significant gaps in service provision or poor quality services have been provided to women, children and communities impacted by domestic and family violence. Some of these can be directly linked to reform processes, others have been brought to light in the media as a result of timely, yet increasing, campaigning and awareness of the issue of DFV.

DVNSW advocates that it is crucial to take an evidence-based approach to arising issues, to identify policy and practice gaps and develop considered strategies in responding to these. Given the increased demand on the domestic and family violence system, the impact of Federal funding cuts, the implementation of *It Stops Here, Safe Home for Life, NSW DV Justice Strategy* and a substantial increase in public awareness and support-seeking in relation to domestic and family violence we

⁶ The Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne, Centre for Community Child Health, Place-based Initiatives, accessed 7th August 2015, >http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/CCCH_Place-based_initiatives_report.pdf<

⁷ For more information on MBCP, see Perpetrator Accountability section below.

believe that that provision of trauma-specialist domestic and family violence SHS support requires careful reconsideration.

6. Lack of Common Practice Standards for the Community Sector.

In 2014, the GSHS specialist homelessness sector reforms changed the way that domestic and family violence services were commissioned and delivered in NSW. A number of practice, service delivery and policy issues have been identified before and following the reforms. DVNSW is committed to promoting trauma-specialist, targeted, culturally-safe practice within an inclusive, feminist and human-rights based framework that places those affected by violence at the centre of the response and ensures that the safety and dignity of women and their families is at the core of all support and policy responses. We propose building upon the decades of expertise to create a sector-driven set of principles that will be a benchmark for mainstream services and future allocation of funding for domestic and family violence service provision.

Guidelines or practice standards should be developed for the sector and by the sector through genuine co-design processes. Engagement with experienced specialist domestic and family violence services, women's services, peak bodies and agencies that work with women, children and communities impacted by violence are crucial to drive the guidelines with a future vision of embedding minimum standards as well as aspirational targets. Specialist domestic and family violence services and services working with women and children have developed ways of working responsively with their clients that correspond to international models of best practice. We should be aiming to offer clients from all communities this level of response in NSW regardless of their postcode.

7. Lack of affordable housing for women, children and young people escaping domestic and family violence.

New South Wales is experiencing an intense affordable housing crisis. Put simply, NSW has insufficient properties to match the current demand for social, public and community housing as well as extreme pressure on the private rental market. These pressures are likely to substantially increase unless governments intervene.

In 2006, there were around 7.8 million Australian households, with a 49% increase to 11.6 million expected by 2031⁸. Waiting times for social housing vary substantially across districts in NSW from between two to more than ten years⁹. It is also predicted that an increased demand for social housing will come from single people and older residents, indicated by Australia's growing ageing population. The National Housing Supply Council has predicted in the next 20 years, 28% of all households will be 65+

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Housing assistance in Australia*, accessed on 13th August 2015,

<<https://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129545051>>, pg.5.

⁹ Family and Community Services, *Expected Waiting Times Overview*, Accessed on 11th August 2015<<http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au/How+to+Apply/Expected+Waiting+Times/>>

years¹⁰. If the NSW Government does not address this there will be inevitably be significant pressures on housing both in the private and public market. It costs nearly five times more to buy a house or apartment today than it did 23 years ago, rents have more than tripled and household incomes simply haven't kept up.

Our member services' core clients are primarily women and children affected by domestic and family violence. Women have lower incomes, spend longer periods out of the workforce, have less security in employment and longer life spans, and for women who have experienced domestic and family violence, the impact is amplified. The evidence base clearly demonstrates that women stay in abusive relationships because there are few safe and appropriate options when it comes to housing. Flexible, responsive, trauma-specialist support over a transitional period is usually required to help women rebuild their lives following experiences of domestic and family violence. The period of time that a survivor of intimate partner abuse needs to rebuild her life having left an abusive relationship depends very much on her personal circumstances but we know that initiatives such as *Start Safely* and *Address Housing* (a specialist transitional housing project set up by FaCS and DVNSW) can offer women with children an opportunity to rebuild their lives and re-enter the private rental market.

The reality is that NSW has a lack of safe, affordable options for vulnerable people impacted by domestic and family violence. Women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence often face lengthy and fragmented processes when attempting to secure temporary and/or longer-term accommodation. LGBTIQ people who have experienced domestic and family violence are extremely vulnerable when accessing emergency accommodation due to fears of (or experiences of) homophobia and transphobia and discrimination. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders women and CALD women and children may experience similar difficulties finding safe accommodation where they can remain connected to family and community. Women with a disability face multiple barriers to accessing support or accommodation that meet their needs. Often it is their carers or the institution that is abusing them. Many women find it just too hard to contemplate leaving an abusive relationship and 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 system that is already overburdened and offers little hope.

Processes often involve moving between various types of accommodation that lack security of tenure and/or failed to provide a sense of safety. The lack of stability generated through constantly relocating can impact directly on the ability of survivors of violence to achieve a life free from abuse. The success of integrated homelessness prevention schemes for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence is demonstrated in Australia, however, their effectiveness depends upon more resourcing and improvements to the prevention, intervention and response systems including legal and judicial processes¹¹.

Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) is an effective, well-evaluated government program which supports women and children to stay in their homes and improves

¹⁰ Australian Department of Social Services, National Housing Supply Council 2nd State of Supply report 2010, accessed 9th of August
<<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/publications-articles/housing/national-housing-supply-council-2nd-state-of-supply-report-2010>>

¹¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, July 2013, *Preventing homelessness for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence*, Issue 164

their security and access to support services. It is working well where it exists but not all communities in NSW have access to SHLV workers. Success in programs of this type are also dependent on male perpetrators being able to access housing, quality perpetrator programs and support. To date in NSW responses to perpetrators are sporadic and under-resourced if present at all.

8. Fragmented accountability for domestic and family violence and data that cannot be aggregated across government departments or programs

Accountability for domestic and family violence across NSW government departments is fragmented and chronically underfunded. It is becoming increasingly difficult for NSW Police, support services, housing and other agencies to respond to the increasing demand. Government agencies continue to have different and conflicting definitions, jurisdictions and ways of working with women, children and communities affected by sexual assault and domestic and family violence – Health, Education, Family and Community Services, Police and Justice responses must to be better coordinated and share good, innovative practice to prevent and respond effectively to the problem.

Collaboration, shared accountability and working together is not just about delivering services together. Genuine collaboration also involves planning together and reviewing performance together and adjusting joint strategies accordingly while being transparent and inclusive with the relevant sectors concurrently. Collaboration and shared accountability requires respectful relationships and open and honest communication between government and non-government partners is something that the government has been routinely criticised of only partially complying to.

Between 2007 and 2012, 768 children known to the NSW Department of Family and Community Services died. Domestic violence was previously reported in 466 (61%) of these children's families¹², showing how intertwined domestic violence and child protection systems are, however, strategic planning at this level still lacks coordination. Silo-ed responses and case-by-case management is proving inadequate to meet the needs of women and children impacted by violence.

A successful feature of any cross-government initiative is data measurement and tracking, it enables better-informed decision-making, and with translation enables effective evaluation. Without common data sets we cannot aggregate data and compare programs and client outcomes effectively. If we were to develop a set of measures that tracked outcomes for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence regardless of the location of their interaction with the government and NGO service system over the long term we could state more confidently that we are providing responses that meet the needs of clients, improve their safety and prevent violence from reoccurring.

There are a number of high-risk groups that experience significant barriers to accessing support. Particular emphasis should be placed on resourcing programs and services that regional, rural and remote areas and community-driven initiatives that address local need. The impacts of disadvantage, poverty and intergenerational violence, which are evident in many of our communities must be urgently addressed but with a commitment to long term resourcing.

¹² NSW Family and Community Services (FaCS), 2012, Child Deaths Annual Report, accessed 11th August 2015 <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/main/documents/child_deaths_report_2012.pdf>

9. Impacts of disadvantage, poverty and intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal communities.

The rate of recorded domestic assault for Indigenous women is more than six times higher than for non-Indigenous women.

BOCSAR, 2011¹³

The impacts of intergenerational trauma, disadvantage and poverty for Aboriginal people in NSW is well documented. In relation to effective responses to family violence, Aboriginal communities in NSW require a long-term commitment from government and corresponding resourcing for effective, evidence-based, culturally appropriate family violence strategies.

To date we have isolated programs and strategies that address family violence. Community initiatives which often have the most impact and are effective are rarely funded in the long-term. We need evidence-based community development strategies and a cross-government approach to tackling family violence in our Aboriginal communities if we are to change attitudes and deliver effective support services and community based solutions.

Our failure to address the causes of family violence are shameful given the prevalence of violence for Aboriginal women including sisters and girls. NSW urgently needs to design, resource and implement a long-term cross-departmental NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy which is driven, owned and promoted by Aboriginal communities and Elders. We cannot continue to fail to recognise the diversity of needs in our Aboriginal communities – an isolated community in the Southern Region of NSW is likely to have significantly different needs from an urban Aboriginal community. The NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy should intersect with a strong, well-resourced Aboriginal Family Violence Network that can develop consistent, community driven, evidence-based best practice initiatives over the long term.

10. Consistent Perpetrator Accountability

Safety of victims and their children is paramount; however it is key that perpetrators of violence are held accountable. A strong, well resourced, trauma-informed justice response is required in NSW. Perpetrator accountability requires action from all system agencies to be able to identify and intervene effectively, to manage perpetrator risk and refer to a Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP) that meets the NSW standards.

The MBCN NSW through its Department of Justice accredited MBCPs deals on a daily basis with misunderstandings as to the gendered nature of DFV especially when identifying the primary aggressor and exploring how women who defend themselves against aggressive partners can be charged with assault because they are too afraid to report previous incidents of their partners abuse. The lack of clearly identifiable pathways to refer men into behaviour change programs and misunderstanding of the difference between '*anger management*' and '*coercive violence*' means that if and when referral occurs women and children are inevitably

¹³ BOCSAR 2011, Trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults: 2001 to 2010, accessed 9th August 2015, <http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/agdbasev7wr/bocsar/documents/pdf/bb61.pdf>

left at risk of ongoing abuse as 'anger management' does not equate with coercive controlling behaviors.

The MBCN NSW and DVNSW fully endorse minimum standards and accreditation for any organisation providing services to men who use coercive controlling violence. It is also clear that there is a need for minimum standards and accreditation for practitioners in the DFV for those that work with women, children and young people as well as those who work individually and in groups with perpetrators, a critical component of service coordination.

Perpetrator accountability requires all state agencies to have a nuanced understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence. Similarly, child protection workers and policy responses must have an embedded understanding of the intersections between domestic, family and sexual violence and the impacts on families and communities, particularly mothers who may fear being further victimised by a system that blames them for not leaving.

Case study

Services frequently report feeling unsupported and isolated within regional areas of NSW. An example, from a crisis refuge in NSW, highlights the clear need for additional support in regional and remote areas so that clients' needs are adequately met. The service had a client referred to them who had experienced severe trauma from a physically and emotionally violent partner over a number of years. The refuge began the assessment process with the client, and the client informed them that she had an alcohol addiction that began during her years of abuse. The refuge informed the client that their service was unable to take in any person who was intoxicated, as per protocol. The client was understanding of this, and requested assistance to find a rehabilitation program or detoxification clinic nearby. After investigating, the refuge discovered there were no appropriate facilities available within the region. The client had nowhere to stay, wasn't eligible for temporary accommodation due to being intoxicated, and there was no service within a reasonable distance that she could go to for assistance with her alcohol addiction.

Both the client and refuge worker felt incredibly helpless, and disappointed at the system. The refuge worker explained to us afterwards that she felt the system had let them all down – she explained that a number of the health services in the region had funding cuts, and that any services that might have been able to assist her client were all full, and had extensive waiting lists. With great difficulty she was able to refer the client to a support service in Sydney, but this meant being away from her children (in care with other family), and the worker was very concerned that this separation from her home, family and other support networks would cause her further trauma and psychological harm.

This case study is an all too common example, particularly in rural, regional and remote areas where service coordination and referral becomes almost impossible. There are often no appropriate services for clients with any level of complexity of need such as women escaping domestic and family violence with a need for drug and alcohol or mental health support. Clients often have multiple issues that need to be addressed sensitively while keeping their wishes at the centre of practice rather than having the experience of not meeting eligibility criteria due to complex circumstances.

Issue identified	Recommendations
<p>1. Concurrent government initiatives and reforms in various stages of implementation that lack coordination across communities and service structures.</p>	<p>Coordinate reform processes and adjust timing so that major change does not coincide concurrently. Coordinate planning process across government departments.</p>
<p>2. Impacts of competitive tendering on the NSW domestic and family violence sector and the price of competition for NGOs.</p>	<p>Any further rounds of procurement need to take a strengths-based approach and ensure stability for both services and clients. Options for procurement need to be identified and agreed well before the end of funding periods and communicated to the sector as early as possible.</p>
<p>3. A shared vision to promote gender equity and challenge the causes of violence against women and girls in all NSW communities.</p>	<p>A common and shared understanding of the gendered nature of domestic and family violence is essential to promote to assist communities and services to understand the role they have in addressing the issue.</p>
<p>4. Domestic and family violence referral pathways in NSW are unclear and there are major gaps in service provision.</p>	<p>The adoption of a coordinated, long-term NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Plan including strategies that respond to diverse communities affected by sexual assault and domestic and family violence and strategies specifically addressing the diverse needs of women, children and young people.</p>

<p>5. Quality service coordination requires sustained and strategic investment.</p>	<p>A minimum investment of \$100 million over the next 3 years in NSW's specialist domestic and family violence sector. Urgent expansion of funding for accessible, specialist, targeted, culturally safe, client-centered services that meet the health, housing, justice and legal needs of all women, children, young people and high risk communities including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women Young women Older women Women with disabilities Culturally and linguistically diverse and migrant women Women living in regional, rural and remote areas Women in prison and women exiting custody and Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex and queer people
<p>6. Lack of Common Practice Standards for the Community Sector.</p>	<p>Support DVNSW and other stakeholders to lead sector driven best practice guidelines</p>
<p>7. Lack of affordable housing for women, children and young people escaping domestic and family violence.</p>	<p>Increase the amount of available affordable housing, prioritising vulnerable cohorts such as women, children and young people escaping domestic and family violence.</p>
<p>8. Fragmented accountability for domestic and family violence and data that cannot be aggregated across government departments or programs</p>	<p>Implement shared performance measures and data collection across programs and services that intend to have positive impacts upon DFV statistics.</p>

<p>9. Impacts of disadvantage, poverty and intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal communities.</p>	<p>Implementation of a long-term cross-departmental NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy driven by Aboriginal communities. The Family Violence Strategy must intersect with a strong, well-resourced Aboriginal Family Violence Network to develop consistent and evidence-based best practice initiatives.</p>
<p>10. Consistent Perpetrator Accountability</p>	<p>Perpetrator accountability requires all state agencies to have a nuanced understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence. Similarly, child protection workers and policy responses must have an embedded understanding of the intersections between domestic, family and sexual violence and the impacts on families and communities.</p>

Conclusions

Walking with services on a genuine journey for reform

In suburbs, towns and regional centres around the NSW the total funding to local service providers to provide direct client services can be significant. A governmental policy shift towards localisation and a greater reliance on NGOs in service provision may provide the sector with optimism for its future. However the success of localisation is highly dependent on all relevant NGO stakeholders being given a seat at the decision-making table and a genuinely inclusive say in what happens in their communities. With truly codesigned approaches we could see better local outcomes that are responsive and accountable to their vulnerable communities.

Women, children and young people impacted by domestic and family violence are a significant proportion of the clients serviced in communities. It is therefore incomprehensible that we would not consider funding ongoing strategic approaches that promote genuine capacity building within the sector and address the needs of clients impacted by trauma. If evidence-based place-based approaches are to be implemented, they have to include ongoing sufficient dedicated resources for NGO capacity building, a critical driver of improved outcomes for those at risk.

Following the GSH Reforms, services need to be given time to consolidate their service delivery and develop structures and relationships to support collaboration and partnerships. The focus needs to be on stabilising the sector after the tender process so that services are providing quality services to homeless people and people who are at risk of homelessness. This is a critical opportunity for government to support existing networks such as local and regional domestic and family violence interagencies which have varying levels of capacity across the state.

Where funding and strategic direction is uncertain, service provision is uncertain. The lack of certainty in the sector relating to the future makes it difficult to plan sustainable service provision that meets changing client needs. DVNSW and a number of our partners are calling for minimum funding and planning periods of 5 years for domestic and family violence services. This would allow organisations to secure and build the capacity of the workforce, collect the shared measures data that we would want to collate and aggregate whilst keeping clients as the central focus and supporting them for the duration they require.

Each service is so unique that a standard approach will often have limited impact in terms of improving practice and increasing the capacity of an organisation. Following the upheaval of the domestic and family violence sector as a result of GSH there have been important local relationships between organisations have been shattered whilst new relationships forged. Domestic and family violence services are operating in a rapidly changing environment. It is crucial that government planning and reforms promote genuine partnership approaches and prevent the further loss of our specialised, experienced workforce .

There are a number of crucial learnings from capacity building projects across NSW such as *FAMS Armidale Project*¹⁴.

¹⁴ The Armidale Project 2011-2013, NSW Family Services, accessed 8th August 2015
>http://www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au/images/pdf/Armidale_project_report_and_evaluation_2013.pdf<

FAMS' project offered detailed strategies and lessons for optimal service coordination in the current environment including:

- Take the time to build trust
- Open doors between agencies and workers
- Reinforce networks and natural relationships
- Link workers and agencies, from NGOs and government agencies, including through cross agency training and information sessions:
- Build a shared vision and common understanding of this vision

It is one thing to implement legislation, MOUs and reporting systems but to get genuine consistency of best practice approaches to prevention and in our responses to domestic and family violence will require an in-depth understanding of the needs, skills and ongoing development of the domestic and family violence sector and the diverse needs of their clients.

Once we have a common mechanism to communicate, track and evaluate this understanding, we need to continue to contract well-resourced, evidence-based, sustainable programs and services to our communities, implemented with specialist expertise and continually developed and supported through transparent, strategic planning. Ultimately, for a woman escaping violence in NSW, geographical location and local service interactions should not be determinants of safety. If we are truly to place women and children impacted by violence at the centre of our responses, government planning and resourcing must reflect and respond to local need.