

Australian Government, The Treasury

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## Domestic Violence NSW Submission on priorities for the 2020-2021 Budget

### About Domestic Violence NSW

Domestic Violence NSW Inc. (DVNSW) is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services in NSW, representing over 100 specialist DFV services providing accommodation, counselling and other support. Our associate members include people experiencing domestic and family violence, homelessness peak bodies, non-government organisations, academics and other individuals. We are members of numerous collaborations and networks in the violence prevention and response section. We are members of the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) and endorse their pre-budget submissions from August and January 2020.

### 1. Women's Policy

#### Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV)

Research demonstrates that gendered violence is preventable and that with resourcing and community action we can create families and communities free from violence (Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth, 2015). Violence prevention initiatives require leadership and coordination of implementation, as well as the resourcing of local initiatives and marginalised groups to adapt violence prevention initiatives to their own context.

Safety in a marriage or partnership should be a human right, however DFV is extremely prevalent in Australia, costing both victims and the community. A Price Waterhouse Cooper report from 2015 estimated that violence against women costs \$21.7 billion a year, with victims bearing the primary burden of this cost. Governments (national and State and Territory) bear the second biggest cost burden, estimated at \$7.8 billion a year, comprising health, administration and social welfare costs (PwC, 2015).

#### Benefits:

- Reduce rates of domestic and family violence in Australia,
- Reduce the number of deaths due to domestic and family violence,
- Invest in prevention initiatives which will educate the community and showcase the forward thinking of the Australian government,
- Australia remains an international leader in the field of violence prevention.

**Recommendation: Provide comprehensive, secure and ongoing funding and institutional support for:**

- A. Our Watch to lead implementation of *Change the Story, the Line, Changing the Picture* and *Counting on Change*, and**

**B. Local and state-based organisations and programs working in the area of violence prevention, to deliver the Our Watch frameworks across jurisdictions, ensuring that funding is not taken from response service funding to fund prevention initiative**

**Adequate and secure funding for specialist DFV services**

Intimate partner and family violence are prevalent in Australia, with demand outstripping supply for specialist services. One in two women has experienced violence, partner emotional abuse or stalking since the age of 15 and one woman per week is murdered due to domestic violence (ANROWS, 2016). Intimate partner violence in LGBTIQ relationships occurs at similar, if not higher rates than towards women (Rainbow Health Victoria, 2020). At least 50% of women who reported DFV reported having a child in their care (Nielson, 2017). As noted above, through investment in prevention, we can turn these figures around and create long-term change, however in the short term, victims need access to support services which increase safety and reduce deaths, disability and injury.

‘You cannot put a price on lives lost to family violence,’ said Victorian Premier Mr Andrews (ABC, 2016). Mr Andrews noted that the financial cost of doing nothing was too high as he committed \$572 million to addressing family violence in Victoria following the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (ABC, 2016). Amongst the specialist services in DVNSW membership, many have 2-6 month wait lists and all have higher demand for service than they are able to supply. These pre-existing issues have been exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic. A substantial national investment will ensure that specialist support services are available to victims in all states and territories and that funding is secure, long-term and adequate.

**Benefits:**

- Ensure victims of DFV have timely access to the specialist supports they need to be safe,
- Victims of DFV have access to crisis support, safe housing, counselling, case work and health care,
- Reduced rates of death, disability and illness due to DFV,
- Children have increased levels of support following experiences of DFV, preventing lifelong trauma,
- Publicity opportunities for MPs to open services across Australia and increase funding.

**Recommendation: Increase funding for specialist domestic and family violence services by 50%.**

**Housing and homelessness**

Domestic and family violence is a leading cause of homelessness amongst women, and is prevalent amongst LGBTIQ people experiencing violence (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018). Supporting the construction of new buildings or purchasing existing developments (impacted by the COVID-19 economic downturn) will go a long way to providing a concrete solution to assist the 40% of women experiencing domestic and family violence who have no long-term housing at the end of an SHS support period (DVNSW Safer Homes analysis). Undertaking an analysis of available housing data will inform the type and location of construction which is a key component to ensuring sufficient housing exists.

**Benefits:**

- People experiencing domestic and family violence are less likely to experience homelessness,
- Boost to the Australian economy,
- Boost recovery efforts following the COVID19 pandemic,
- Substantial opportunities for promotion of Australian Government’s investment.

**Recommendation: Construct new social and affordable housing, at the National equivalent of 5000 NSW properties per year for 10 years.**

## 2. Welfare entitlements

A lack of access to income is a primary contributor to women being unable to leave DFV relationships. Economic insecurity has been repeatedly linked to multiple types of violence against women and children (Ulbrick, 2020). Many women and children and LGBTIQ people leaving violence are reliant on the Newstart Allowance (\$335 per fortnight prior to the introduction of the Jobseeker payment in March 2020). Receiving Newstart prior to COVID meant living below the poverty line. For people experiencing violence, it means increased access to financial security, options, safe housing and safety.

### Benefits:

- Additional income for jobseekers boosts the economy,
- Prevention of homelessness for people experiencing DFV,
- Financial stability allows for increased safety for people experiencing DFV,
- Children of parents are better off, can eat more nutritious food and be better supported,
- People on temporary visas experiencing violence can receive a special benefit to ensure safety and wellbeing for themselves and their children, who are often Australian citizens.

**Recommendation 1: Maintains the JobSeeker subsidy as a permanent increase to Newstart payments.**

**Recommendation 2: Expand eligibility for Special Benefit to include people who are on all types of temporary visas and have experienced domestic and family violence. The rates of Special Benefit should be increased to make it liveable.**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a pre-budget submission ahead of the 2020-2021 Budget. Please contact us for further details as necessary via the details below.

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