

# Appendix G – Supporting women



Ana was married for 23 years before her marriage broke down and then she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She never thought she would be homeless.

*Each person has their own unique experience and needs. It is important to understand the intersectionality between a person's gender, race, sexual identity, culture, experiences and circumstances. Workers may refer to multiple appendices to assist their understanding, engagement and support for each person they engage.*

## Overview

Women make up 44 per cent of Australia's homeless population, an increase of 10.1 per cent since 2016<sup>i</sup>. In 2021/2022 almost 60 per cent of people supported by specialist homelessness services were women, with domestic and family violence (DFV) being one of the leading causes for women to become homeless<sup>ii</sup>. DFV can have immediate, re-occurring and long-term impacts for a woman and her dependents (if applicable). For more information on supporting women who have experienced DFV see **Appendix L**.

Other independent or intersecting factors that increase a woman's risk of experiencing homelessness include the gender pay gap, low retirement incomes, discrimination, spousal bereavement, caring responsibilities, limited savings and relationship breakdown.

Older women are at an increased risk of experiencing homelessness, due to many of the aforementioned risks. They may also be at risk of experiencing homelessness as a result of elder abuse, particularly financial abuse from family members. Older women can also face specific barriers to accessing services. For more information on supporting older people see **Appendix I**.

Women experiencing homelessness tend to remain out of sight, away from areas where other people experiencing homelessness may congregate. For example, they are more likely to sleep in their car or couchsurf. This is often due to fear of violence, rape or other abuse<sup>iii</sup>. Women experiencing homelessness are at greater risk of violence and sexual abuse and are often forced into harmful situations and/or relationships out of necessity<sup>iv</sup>.

On average, women have longer lifespans. Women also have specific and sometimes complex health needs that change over time and require specialised responses. Some of these unique experiences may include pregnancy, menstruation, and menopause, all of which may have physical, emotional, mental, and financial impacts. Women experiencing homelessness may not have access or be aware of available health and support services which can exacerbate their condition/s.

Mental health is another pressing concern for women. One in six women in Australia experience depression and one in three women experience anxiety during their lifetime<sup>v</sup>. Women also experience post-traumatic stress disorder and eating disorders at higher rates than men<sup>vi</sup>. Women's mental health issues are compounded by unique circumstances including postnatal depression, DFV, gender-based discrimination<sup>vii</sup>, removal of children from their care, and intergenerational trauma. These circumstances make it difficult for some women to obtain housing, employment, and other vital economic resources to support themselves and their dependents<sup>viii</sup>. For more information on supporting people in mental distress see **Appendix J**.

Workers must provide an empathetic and non-judgmental response to best support and improve the outcomes for women experiencing homelessness. Workers should be educated on strategies related to trauma-informed care and strength-based practice. Specialised supports are available to help women address their specific needs and/or provide safe accommodation.

# Engagement strategy

## Things to consider before engaging:

- Women experiencing homelessness may have experienced trauma and therefore require a trauma-informed, strength-based response. This focuses on building a sense of physical, emotional and cultural safety for the person.
- Consider who would be best suited to approach the person on a case by case basis, including the number of workers that may approach and the gender of the worker. It is also important for the worker to take into consideration the woman's culture, religion, and age to ensure an appropriate response.
- Recognise how socio-cultural factors such as gender inequality, power, colonisation and disenfranchisement give rise to victimisation and are barriers to women seeking support.
- Women on temporary visas or other non-residents may feel threatened to engage out of fear their visa status will be revoked. For more information on supporting temporary visa holders or other non-residents see **Appendix E**.
- Pregnant women experiencing homelessness may be reluctant to interact with a worker or access services out of fear that their baby may be removed from their care. Babies born to women experiencing homelessness are at higher risk of birth complications, and longer-term medical complications<sup>ix</sup>. Information and services should focus on supporting the woman to understand services available to her and ways that she can support the health and development of the growing baby.
- Children accompanying women experiencing homelessness require a specialised response. For information on supporting children and young people see **Appendix B**.

- Some women may experience additional complexities or challenges due to the intersectionality of other characteristics or experiences. Refer to other relevant appendices as needed when interacting.

## Strategies for engagement:

- Introduce yourself in a friendly manner, stating your name and the agency/organisation you work for.
- Maintain appropriate distance and allow the woman to choose how and where she would like to engage to ensure physical and emotional safety.
- Be mindful of verbal and non-verbal cues such as body language and tone. Consider strategies such as bending to be level with the person or using a low, calm tone of voice.
- Encourage the woman to express her needs which may differ from the needs you identify. This may require time and multiple interactions to build trust and rapport.
- Model inclusive, respectful, and fair relationships between service users, staff and management.
- Respectfully communicate using gender neutral and non-patronising language. Empower the woman to make her own choices and offer options and information.
- Be non-judgemental and encourage pregnant women to seek or access medical support.
- Ensure the woman has a safe place to stay that does not exploit her or result in other precarious and/or unsafe situations. Offer opportunities for women to safety plan where risks are identified.
- Be aware of local services and supports and provide referrals to assistance if requested.

## RESOURCES

CRISIS SUPPORT		
Name	Service	Contact Details
<a href="#">1800 Respect</a>	The 24 hour national domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, information and support service.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 732 732 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.1800respect.org.au">https://www.1800respect.org.au</a>
<a href="#">NSW Domestic Violence Line</a>	The 24 hour NSW domestic and family violence counselling, information and referral service.	<b>Phone:</b> 1800 656 463 <b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/domestic--family-and-sexual-violence-support-contacts/nsw-domestic-violence-line.html">https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/domestic--family-and-sexual-violence-support-contacts/nsw-domestic-violence-line.html</a>
<a href="#">Ask Izzy</a>	A website directory that connects people who are in need with nearby services such as housing, food, health care and legal services in their local area.	<b>Website:</b> <a href="https://askizzy.org.au">https://askizzy.org.au</a>

## RESOURCES

Name	Service	Contact Details
<a href="#">Link2Home</a>	A statewide telephone service providing information, assessment and referral to specialist homelessness services, temporary accommodation and other appropriate services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week every day of the year.	<p><b>Phone:</b> 1800 152 152</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/ways/are-you-homeless">https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/ways/are-you-homeless</a></p>

## OTHER SUPPORT

Name	Service	Contact Details
<a href="#">Full Stop Australia</a>	Confidential, trauma specialist counselling for people of all genders who are impacted by violence and abuse, as well as their friends, colleagues and family members.	<p><b>Phone:</b> 1800 Full Stop (1800 385 578)</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.fullstop.org.au">https://www.fullstop.org.au</a></p>
<a href="#">Law Access NSW</a>	A free government telephone service that provides legal information, referrals and in some cases, advice for people who have a legal problem in NSW.	<p><b>Phone:</b> 1300 888 529</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/contact-us">https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/contact-us</a></p>
<a href="#">Muslim Women Australia</a>	Provides support and advocacy for women including Muslim women.	<p><b>Phone:</b> (02) 9750 6916</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="https://mwa.org.au/">https://mwa.org.au/</a></p>
<a href="#">NSW Health Sexual Assault Services</a>	A network of state-wide free services for victims of sexual assault, including crisis and ongoing counselling, information and support, medical care and forensic examination, group work and court preparation. There is at least one sexual assault service open 24 hours a day in each Local Health District.	<b>Website:</b> <a href="https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/parvan/sexualassault/Pages/health-sas-services.aspx">https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/parvan/sexualassault/Pages/health-sas-services.aspx</a>
<a href="#">Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP)</a>	Provides direct services to sex workers across the state via peer-based outreach and a range of other direct support services.	<p><b>Phone:</b> (02) 9184 9466</p> <p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:admin@swop.org.au">admin@swop.org.au</a> or <a href="mailto:swopconnect@swop.org.au">swopconnect@swop.org.au</a></p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="https://swop.org.au">https://swop.org.au</a></p>
<a href="#">Women's Health Centres NSW</a>	An association of statewide women's health centres and specialist women's centres that are non-government, community based, feminist services providing choices for women to determine their individual health needs. A list of centres is available on the website.	<p><b>Phone:</b> 02 9560 0866</p> <p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:info@whnsw.asn.au">info@whnsw.asn.au</a></p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="https://whnsw.asn.au">https://whnsw.asn.au</a></p>

- i Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Estimating Homelessness: Census*, ABS website, 2021.
- ii Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021–22*, AIHW website, 2022.
- iii Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Violence, Harassment and Bullying and Homelessness*, AHRC website, 2012.
- iv Ibid.
- v Beyond Blue, *Women*, Beyond Blue website, 2023.
- vi Ibid.
- vii Women's Mental Health Alliance, *Additional evidence on gender and mental health for the Royal Commission into Victoria's mental health system*, Women's Mental Health Alliance, 2020.
- viii Ibid.
- ix F Haylett, S Murrat, J Watson and J Theobald, *The Extent, Nature and Impact of Homelessness on Pregnant Women and Their Babies*, Council to Homeless Persons website, 2022.
- x Porchlight UK, *Working with homeless women*, Porchlight UK website, 2022.