

**NSW DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE
DISCLOSURE
SCHEME
EVALUATION**

**CRISIS
ASSISTANCE
SERVICE
REVIEW**

**PILOTS
FINAL REPORT**

URBIS

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- Representatives of the NSW Police Force from central office and the four Local Area Commands participating in the pilot
- Participants in the two pilot projects
- Additional service providers from the four pilot regions
- The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research for providing domestic violence data.

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ACRONYMS

ADVO	Apprehended Domestic Violence Order
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CAS	Crisis Assistance Service
COAG	Council of Australian Government
COPS	Computerised Operational Policing System
DVDS	Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme
DVIS	Domestic Violence Intervention Service
DVLOs	Domestic Violence Liaison Officers
DVSAT	Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool
FACS	Department of Family and Community Services
FTE	Full-time equivalent
LAC	Local Area Command
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
LCP	Local Coordination Point
NDVOS	National Domestic Violence Order Scheme
NGO	Non-government Organisation
POI	Person of Interest
STMP	Suspect Target Management Plans
UK	United Kingdom
WDVCAS	Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2016, the NSW Government launched two new domestic violence initiatives: the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) and the Crisis Assistance Service. The first of its kind in Australia, the DVDS provides a mechanism whereby people with concerns in their relationship can request a disclosure from the NSW Police Force about whether their partner (or former partner) has a prior conviction for domestic violence or other relevant criminal offences.

The Crisis Assistance Service pilot, meanwhile, was designed to provide 24/7 service support to victims of domestic and family violence in incidents reported to the police.

Both initiatives were funded as pilots for a two-year period from mid- April 2016. Although both were quite discrete in their aims and objectives, contracts were awarded to three providers to operate both schemes simultaneously in four NSW Police Local Area Commands (LACs). A total of \$2.3 million was allocated to the NGOs to establish and provide the services, and for program training and evaluation.

In 2016, Urbis was commissioned by the NSW Department of Justice (contract managed by Women NSW) to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the DVDS, and a high level review of the Crisis Assistance Service. This report is the Final Evaluation Report, following on from an Interim Evaluation Report prepared in June 2017. The primary focus of this report is the evaluation of the DVDS.

EVALUATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The DVDS evaluation and the review of the Crisis Assistance Service involved both process and outcome components over a two-year period.

The *process* evaluation explored:

- implementation issues and challenges,
- the nature of requests outside the scope of the pilot

The *outcomes* evaluation investigated:

- the impact of disclosure or non-disclosure on DVDS applicants
- satisfaction levels of primary person/third party applicants and clients with the process and assistance provided
- the intersection between the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service and how this has supported victims of domestic violence
- impact and costs to agencies and services that are involved in administration, decision-making and provision of support services
- any unintended consequences for potential victims, police or support services.

The Terms of Reference did not include a cost benefit analysis, a cost efficiency analysis or an assessment of the scalability of the DVDS or Crisis Assistance Service models. The Terms of Reference initially included an examination of any unintended consequences for perpetrators. However, when developing the evaluation program logic and evaluation methodology, it was decided to exclude assessing unintended consequence for perpetrators. It was considered too problematic to assess unintended consequences for perpetrators given their limited numbers and that the identity of the Persons of Interest and their subsequent contact with the criminal justice system was not available to the evaluation.

The evaluation was overseen by the DVDS Evaluation Advisory Group which included representatives from the following:

- Women NSW (NSW Ministry of Health to May 2017; Department of Family and Community Services from May 2017)
- Department of Family and Community Services
- Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program (Legal Aid NSW)

- NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (Department of Justice NSW)
- Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence (NSW Ministry of Health, to May 2017)
- Domestic Violence NSW
- Domestic and Family Violence Team NSW Police Force.
- NSW Treasury
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre Inc.
- School of Social Sciences, University of New South Wales.

The sources of data for the evaluation included both quantitative and qualitative data: the pilot program data sets; expenditure reports; eight site visits involving in-depth interviews with management and staff from the NGO support services and police representatives from each LAC; in depth interviews with DVDS applicants and Crisis Assistance Service clients; and consultations with a small number of agencies working closely with one or both initiatives. Police domestic violence data, supplied by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, was also included.

BACKGROUND TO THE DVDS

The NSW DVDS is based on a similar United Kingdom model called the Domestic Abuse and Disclosure Scheme, also known as Clare's Law. A similar Scheme was introduced in New Zealand in 2015 and other jurisdictions in Australia are considering or have recently considered (and in one case rejected) establishing a DVDS.

In the context of the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform: 2016-2021: Safer Lives for Women, Men and Children* launched in August 2016, the DVDS is designed to support early intervention priorities related to preventing domestic and family violence, intervening early and supporting victims or people at risk. The DVDS aims to contribute to a reduction in domestic violence by providing certain information to people who may be at risk because of a current or former partner's criminal history. This is seen to allow people to make informed decisions about their relationship and safety, and to seek assistance or undertake safety planning (NSW Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme Discussion Paper, 2015). The DVDS also aims to hold perpetrators to account, and to remove the veil of secrecy regarding prior domestic violence offending that can place women and men at risk in new relationships.

The development of the DVDS involved extensive consultation on model options: seventy-five written responses were received and considered. A revised DVDS model was subsequently developed and then endorsed on 12 February 2016 by the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the (then) Minister for Women, the (then) Deputy Premier and the (then) Attorney General.

DVDS PILOT EVALUATION: KEY FINDINGS AND

There has been limited demand for the Scheme over the two-year pilot

OPTIONS

No usage targets or expectations were set at the commencement of the DVDS pilot. The demand for the Scheme has been limited thus far and there is little sign of any increase in demand over time as the DVDS pilot has become more established. Over a 19 month period, from mid-April 2016 to October 2017, 105 applications have been submitted to the DVDS. This averages five to six applications a month across all four pilot LACs. Most applications have been made by the primary person (81%) i.e. the person at risk, with the remainder made by a third party, usually a family member.

With the exception of Aboriginal applicants, there appears to have been limited use of the DVDS by diverse communities

There is little evidence to suggest that people from diverse CALD communities have been major users of the Scheme so far. People with a disability are using the Scheme, but are under-represented relative to their numbers in the population. There has been extremely limited, if any, involvement, of people identifying as LGBTQI. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise one in seven (15%) of DVDS

applicants. Notwithstanding that one of the pilot areas has a large Aboriginal population, this is a good result overall given the range of cultural and other barriers that often exist for Aboriginal people at risk accessing domestic violence and/or police initiatives. The low utilisation of the DVDS by some groups highlights the need for specific engagement strategies to be developed for different communities in close consultation with relevant community organisations.

The majority of the people who have utilised the DVDS to date do not meet the target group

The DVDS was envisioned as an early intervention initiative. However, only a minority of applicants in the pilot phase are in the early stages of a relationship. Just over a third have been in a relationship with the person of interest (POI) for six months or less. Half have been in a relationship with the POI for a year or more, and 25% for over three years. One in four were living with their partner at the time of the application and some have children with the POI. The DVDS pilot has thus failed to effectively reach the intended early intervention target group. An unintended consequence of the pilot, however, is that the DVDS has been found to have been useful to a broader range of people than those in the early stages of an intimate relationship, and who are potentially at risk at different stages in their relationship with the POI.

Three distinct groups of DVDS applicants have emerged:

- People at an early stage in an intimate relationship who have concerns or anxieties about potential or actual abuse
- People who have been in a relationship with the POI for some time, who are contemplating leaving and who want to obtain information that would help them make a decision about whether or not to end the relationship
- People who have been in a relationship with the POI, but are no longer living with them, who want to obtain information that would confirm they have made the right decision to separate, help them resist requests from the POI to return, and to harden resolve about taking legal action (e.g. an ADVO) against the POI.

There are various reasons for the limited numbers of applicants in the early stages of their relationship

In the first year of the pilot, support services focussed most of their effort on promoting the Scheme within service networks, rather than in the broader community. In response to the low number of applications, from mid-2017 on, support services started to broaden the focus of communications through promoting the Scheme in hairdressers, nail bars, GP surgeries, public toilets etc. Although it is too soon to judge how effective these strategies are in reaching a broader audience, so far these efforts have not shown any signs of increasing demand. It needs to be acknowledged that it takes times for any new service or concept to gain traction in the community. Nevertheless, the complexity of the task and the skills required to effectively 'market' the DVDS to members of the broader community who have no contact with service networks and who are not likely to identify as being at risk of domestic violence, seems to have been underestimated.

It needs to be noted, however, that it is false to assume that 'early intervention' should focus exclusively on people in the community who have not been involved in domestic violence situations before e.g. younger people, or people who are dating. The DVDS has been shown to be useful to people who have had a history of living in violent and abusive relationships, and who do not want to find themselves in that situation again. They have used the DVDS as they want to be confident that any new relationship they are contemplating does not constitute a risk to themselves or their family. Domestic violence and other networks are still an appropriate source of referral to the DVDS for people in these situations.

The level of usage of the DVDS is partly a function of program design

The major barrier to accessing the DVDS is that the only way to do so is through attending a police station in person. This was consistently raised as highly problematic by all services and most police involved in the pilot. The single pathway is seen as a major deterrent to people who, for example, are embarrassed; anxious that they will be seen or recognised entering a police station; uncomfortable about telling their story in public; or fear the police or repercussions should others see them in the police station. There is considerable support for the application process to be broadened to include an online capability, either submitted directly by the applicant, or via a support service or other avenue. This would require new operational procedures: most importantly, for police to assess applications to ensure they meet the Scheme guidelines. Another option to expand the entry points is for community services to include the DVDS as a tool in their standard

intake process, which would 'trigger' consideration of the Scheme. There is also scope for the police to play a role in informing people about the Scheme if they have contact with a victim and know the POI has a criminal history but no action is taken. Increasing the avenues for making an application is likely to increase demand for the DVDS. Depending on the extent of the increase, this may have implications for police resources, particularly DVLOs.

Although the number of DVDS applications is modest, there are early indications that the Scheme is proving of value to individual applicants who are taking safety actions

More than two out of five (42%) DVDS applications result in a disclosure. This indicates that in many cases, applicants' concerns have a strong foundation. Where relevant criminal offences have been disclosed, there is emerging if still limited evidence that this information is being used by some applicants to make decisions about their relationship and/or to take actions to increase their own and/or their children's safety. In most cases, this involves a decision to end or leave a relationship. It can also entail a deepening of the applicant's resolve about a decision or course of action they have already made e.g. to leave the relationship or to take or strengthen legal action against their partner/ex-partner.

People accessing the DVDS are also being linked into a range of community supports they might not have otherwise accessed: four of five applicants accessed support through the Scheme. Importantly, applicants who did not receive a disclosure (i.e. where there were no defined 'relevant offences' to disclose) have been linked into supports at the same rate as applicants who did receive a disclosure and have found the process to be valuable.

Not all applicants take action as result of a disclosure, however, and some choose to continue their relationship with the POI. This is not surprising. Relationships are complex as is decision-making in the context of an abusive relationship. Should subsequent problems arise, however, they have a contact at the service provider who they can contact at any time should they wish to do so.

The small number of applicants interviewed were generally satisfied with the DVDS process, although some found the disclosure meeting confusing.

There is no information to indicate whether applicants are safer as a result of using the DVDS

The number of people who have used the DVDS to date is too low to make this judgement. Also, it is important to note that contact with the DVDS is often brief and, in some cases, transactional in nature. It represents a point-in-time intervention, which may or may not have an impact on future decision-making or actions. The most we can say at this point is that some applicants have used the information obtained through the DVDS to end (or plan to end) their relationship, or make a decision not to resume their relationship with the POI. Leaving an abusive relationship can place a person at high risk. Through the DVDS, most applicants have been involved in safety planning and accessed supports that have the potential to increase their safety: some have moved house or relocated to a new area.

Those who are critical of DVDS-type schemes might argue this places the onus on the person at risk to take action, rather than increase perpetrator accountability. However, it needs to be noted that, in many cases, no offence has been committed and so there is no mechanism for taking action against the POI. It also needs to be noted that in a few cases, contact with the DVDS has prompted the applicant to make a complaint to the police about a previous incident and/or to seek to strengthen the conditions of an ADVO or family court order. This is arguably indicative of increased accountability.

The per case cost of operating the DVDS is high

Based on expenditure figures supplied by the NGOs for one year of operation, across the four pilot regions the **average cost per DVDS application is \$3,959**. This cost is over and above the cost of operating the Crisis Assistance Service, and relates only to the direct cost to government through the pilot program funding. Given the limited contact applicants have with the DVDS (in some cases, brief contact over a two week period), these costs are very high. Unless demand for the DVDS is increased, it does not represent a cost-effective proposition.

The operation of the DVDS has worked well – with strong partnerships approach being developed between the DVLOs in each LAC and the support services

There has been good communication and cooperation between the NGOs and the police and the administration process seems to have run smoothly in most cases. This has been enhanced by a strong commitment to the success of the Scheme by both police (in particular the DVLOs) and the support services as well as continuity in staffing over the life of the pilot. Applications have been processed in time (with a couple of exceptions) and police and support services are generally happy with the way the disclosure meetings have been run. Both agree it is critical to the success of the Scheme that this dual approach is adopted, and that both parties have a good knowledge, experience and understanding of domestic violence to manage the often difficult and sensitive conversations with applicants during disclosure meetings.

No negative unintended impacts were identified for the police or the service system

The limited demand for the DVDS to date has not placed undue burden on support services or referral agencies. Police were required to administer the Scheme with no additional resources and have been able to do so, despite the very heavy workloads of DVLOs who have had major responsibility for promoting the Scheme internally, assisting General Duties Officers take applications, and conducting the disclosure meetings. As noted above, a significant increase in applications would result in a 'tipping point' for police resources that would need to be addressed.

Various aspects of the DVDS model require further consideration

These include:

- Providing further guidance to police, support services and applicants about the level and type of evidence needed to demonstrate concern in order to meet the eligibility criteria for submitting an application to the DVDS
- Lowering the disclosure threshold to include ADVOs: a previous ADVO (or a number of ADVOs over time or across different relationships) is regarded by the most of those consulted as indicative of a pattern of abusive behaviour that would potentially put the primary person at risk of violence. Extending this to cover ADVOs in all jurisdictions through the new National Family Violence Order Scheme, has considerable potential to increase the effectiveness of the DVDS
- Lowering the disclosure threshold to include a broader range of non-domestic violence offences
- Accessing the POI's prior relevant criminal history from other jurisdictions in certain circumstances: while the logistical, administrative and resource implications of obtaining this information are acknowledged, they are not insurmountable and possibly warranted in some cases.

The report on the evaluation DVDS concludes with over 25 options for consideration addressing DVDS model design, implementation and roll-out

BACKGROUND TO THE CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

The Crisis Assistance Service is designed to provide 24/7 service support to victims of domestic and family violence in the immediate aftermath of an incident (should the person choose to access the service) in the four pilot LACs.

Each support service is contracted to have service delivery infrastructure in place to deliver direct operation of services to all areas of the LAC, to assist victims through the provision of transport to ensure safety, access to temporary housing, basic emergency supplies for victims and their children such as food, toiletries and toys, as well as ongoing support and service linkages. This includes victim intake and assessment, crisis support and referrals to counselling, legal/court and parenting support, accommodation, housing and financial support. The Crisis Assistance Service pilot is designed to assist police by providing crisis assistance for victims (including DVDS applicants where necessary) in the immediate aftermath of domestic violence by addressing current service gaps and complementing current responses (such as the WDVCS program) to enable their access to emergency accommodation and other support (documentation supplied by NSW Department of Family and Community Services). The service is available 24 hours a day. The Crisis

Assistance Service is driven by the NSW Police Force, as the sole point of referral to the Scheme, with victim consent.

CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE PILOT REVIEW: KEY

Police referrals to the Crisis Assistance Service have fallen short of expectations

FINDINGS AND OPTIONS

A total of 271 clients were referred by the four LACs to the Crisis Assistance Service between April 2016 and October 2017. The number of referrals has remained fairly consistent over the 19 months of the pilot – averaging approximately five calls per LAC each month. Service demand has not increased as the pilot has become more established and a range of initiatives employed to raise police awareness of the service.

As no data exists on the number of domestic violence incidents that involve 'a crisis' the rate of referral to the Crisis Assistance Service cannot be assessed, comparisons with the number of domestic violence incidents does, however, place the number of referrals in context. Based on a comparison with police figures for the four LACs from April 2016 to September 2017 (supplied by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research), the clients referred to the Crisis Assistance Service represent:

- 8.6% of the 2,780 incidents of domestic violence assault in that period
- 13.2% of the 1,822 POI proceeded against (i.e. where one or more charges were laid)
- 8% of the 2,986 victims of domestic violence assault incidents,

This broad pattern was evident across all four pilot LACs.

There are a range of reasons for the low rate of police referral to the Crisis Assistance Service

No business case and limited planning seems to have been undertaken prior to the introduction of the Crisis Assistance Service. The need for the service, and most importantly, its role and scope in relation to existing or planned domestic violence initiatives, is not clear. Moreover, there are no service targets or indications of the expected level of demand for the new initiative. Neither is there any data on the proportion of domestic violence incidents where the victim is considered to be in a crisis situation. The definition of crisis varies and is not clearly defined.

From the police perspective, the Crisis Assistance Service does not have a clearly defined role in relation to other domestic violence services. The Scheme is perceived to duplicate or overlap with other services, particularly Safer Pathway and the NSW Domestic Violence Hotline for crisis accommodation. Many Police do not see the need, or the potential advantage, in the domestic violence victim being contacted by a crisis support service in the immediate aftermath of the domestic violence incident. They are aware *all* people who have been involved in a domestic violence incident will be called by the Local Coordination Point (LCP) within a few hours to assess their need for support.

The Crisis Assistance Service pilot commenced at a time when several other significant domestic violence reforms involving the police and support services were being introduced, including the roll out of Safer Pathway (involving a call by a Local Coordination Point to all victims of domestic violence incidents soon after the incident) and the introduction of Evidence-in Chief for domestic violence incidents. General Duties Officers are reportedly confused about the range of domestic violence and other crisis support services available and the specific role of the Crisis Assistance Service.

The launch of the Crisis Assistance Service was 'soft' and lacked sufficient 'top down' support from senior LAC management. No formal Operational Guidelines were written and limited formal training conducted with General Duties Officers who attend domestic violence incidents. Domestic Violence Coordinators, Domestic Violence Liaison Officers, Crime Manager and the support services made very significant efforts to inform police about the service and to keep it front of mind. This included regular briefings before shifts, including material and briefings in the orientation of new officers, and the production of cards and flow charts to assist police. With one exception, there seemed to be limited monitoring and reporting to senior management.

Finally, not all people who are offered referral to the Crisis Assistance Service take up the offer of support. It is unknown how many people were offered support by police.

The Crisis Assistance Service has provided support to people in the immediate aftermath of a domestic violence incident

This support includes talking to victims of domestic violence to assess their immediate emotional well-being and safety, their need for emergency accommodation and other immediate practical assistance. Where needed, they also personally met with the victim of domestic violence, most commonly at the police station or another safe place nearby. They provide emotional support to distressed victims, which can assist police when taking statements. This support meets a gap in the current service system, particularly after hours, during weekdays and on weekends, when many other support services are closed.

The Crisis Assistance Service is expensive model at the current level of referrals

Based on information provided by the three NGOs operating the four pilots, the total cost of operating the Crisis Assistance Service in the 12 month period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 was \$601,427.

This results in **an average cost of \$3,831 per crisis referral** received in that 12 month period. The cost per referral varied considerably across the four pilot areas given that two LACs had double the number of calls than the other two LACs.

Notwithstanding the caveats about the accuracy of these costings, they do suggest that the per cost case of the Crisis Assistance Services is high given the current level of utilisation and the fact the scheme is designed to be a crisis, rather than a casework service. The cost of operating an out-of-hours service and having people 'on call' 24/7 is considerable, however, and is clearly a factor that adds to the cost of operating the service (compared to the DVDS which is, in most cases, operates within normal business hours).

The Crisis Assistance Service has worked effectively with WDVCS and LCPs

It has provided valuable information to the LCPs on clients contacted after hours. This has given the LCPs a greater understanding of the client's situation (more than they might otherwise have gained from their phone call to the client) especially where the support worker from the Crisis Assistance Service has had a face-to-face meeting with the client. Clients are sometimes more receptive to the LCP phone call in the morning as there has effectively been a 'warm referral' from the Crisis Assistance Service. The fact that some of the contracted NGOs also run the WDVCS and/or the LCP has supported the development of effective working partnerships between the services.

The unique value of the Crisis Assistance Service is that it can engage with domestic violence victims at the point of crisis – when they may be more amenable to accepting support than several hours later – when some of the immediate emergency has died down and the client may have come under pressure from others (e.g. the perpetrator's family) not to take any action. It can also offer face-to-face support (which no other crisis services does) as well as practical support which can make any move to emergency accommodation a little easier for the victim. Importantly, they are also able to advocate for the person they are supporting, in negotiating crisis accommodation e.g. to be offered accommodation close to family and social networks.

However, there were technical/administrative issues that made it difficult for the LCP/WDVCS to identify from police referrals those involving the Crisis Assistance Service or the DVDS, leading to confusion and potential service duplication.

Half of referrals to the Crisis Assistance Service have been in business hours and many do not involve face-to-face contact

This means that the usage pattern does not align with the key service gap it was designed to fill. The unique features of the Crisis Assistance service is that it was introduced to provide after hours, face-to-face support when needed. Only half (51%) of crisis referrals occurred after-hours and over a third of cases (36%) involved phone contact only.

The definition and scope of crisis support needs to be clarified

The definition and scope of crisis support is not sufficiently defined or understood. It is being applied differentially across the LACs and support services. 'Crisis support' in some cases can extend to five or more contacts or meetings with the client. In the future, it would be important to consider the definition and scope of 'crisis assistance' to ensure a broadly consistent approach across locations. Police too have varying definitions of crisis and this is likely to impact on the situations in which they consider it appropriate or useful to refer people to the Crisis Assistance Service.

There is evidence that Crisis Assistance Service referrals increase with greater leadership, accountability and monitoring

The recent increase in the number of police referrals in one LAC has been attributed to the introduction of some new procedures. These included a requirement for General Duties Officers to include in their 'narrative report' whether or not they offered the victim support (or made a crisis referral) whilst attending a domestic violence incident and if not, why. This action together with others resulted in an increase in the number of referrals made in that LAC since June 2017. This clearly indicates there is scope to further increase the number of referrals with increased accountability and monitoring within LACs.

There is a need to map the range of domestic violence crisis and support service to ascertain the specific role of the Crisis Assistance Service and its positioning in the sector

Three 24-hour domestic violence hotlines are available in NSW as well as a range of domestic violence support services across NSW in business hours (when half the referrals are being received by the Crisis Assistance Service). There are also additional domestic violence services operating in local communities. Clarifying the role of the Crisis Assistance Service in this service landscape, will assist with determining where and how it might be best positioned in the sector to maximise its effectiveness, and address some of the confusion that police (and community members) experience in understanding different domestic violence service roles and boundaries.

The review of the Crisis Assistance Service concludes with a number of options for consideration relating to program design, implementation and roll-out

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

In April 2016, the NSW Government launched two new domestic violence initiatives: the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) and the Crisis Assistance Service. The first of its kind in Australia, the DVDS provides a mechanism whereby people with concerns in their relationship can request a disclosure from the NSW Police Force about whether or not their partner (or former partner) has a prior conviction for domestic violence or other relevant criminal offences. The Crisis Assistance Service pilot, meanwhile, was designed to provide 24/7 service support to victims of domestic and family violence in incidents reported to the police. Both initiatives were funded as pilots for a two-year period from April 2016. Although the schemes were quite discrete in their aims and objectives, contracts were awarded to three providers to operate both schemes simultaneously in four NSW Police Local Area Commands (LACs).

Urbis was commissioned by the NSW Department of Justice to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the DVDS, and a high level review of the Crisis Assistance Service (contract management was undertaken by Women NSW). This report is the Final Evaluation Report, following on from an Interim Evaluation Report prepared in June 2017.

1.1. THE POLICY CONTEXT

Recent years have seen an unprecedented increase in domestic and family violence reform in Australia. This attention is much needed given domestic and family violence is the leading contributor of premature death for women aged between 14 and 45 years nationally (NSW Government, 2016). Australia-wide, 2.2 million women have experienced male intimate partner violence since the age of 15 (Cox, 2015). One in five women have experienced sexual violence, and one in six have experienced physical or sexual violence by their current or former partner (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), 2015). In New South Wales, 66,488 domestic violence related incidents were recorded in the 12 months from October 2016 to September 2017 (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 2018).

The reduction of domestic and family violence is one of the NSW Premier's Priorities. The NSW Government is working towards reducing the proportion of domestic violence perpetrators reoffending by 25% by 2021 (based on the 2019 cohort of perpetrators).

Several frameworks have been developed with the aim of addressing domestic and family violence across Australia and within NSW. A common thread to these frameworks is a change to service delivery and implementing a more coordinated, person-centred approach.

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan) is a coordinated Commonwealth and state approach that aims to achieve "a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children" (COAG, 2010, p.10). The National Plan consists of four three-year plans. The Third Action Plan was released in October 2016 and sets out six national priority areas:

- prevention and early intervention
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children
- greater support and choice
- sexual violence
- responding to children living with violence
- keeping perpetrators accountable across all systems (COAG, 2016, p.8).

In New South Wales, the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform: 2016-2021: Safer lives for women, men and children was launched in August 2016. The Blueprint sets out six actions:

- preventing domestic and family violence
- intervening early with vulnerable communities
- supporting victims
- holding perpetrators accountable
- delivering quality services
- improving the system (NSW Ministry of Health, 2016, p.2-3).

The DVDS and Crisis Assistance Service are designed to support the first three of the Blueprint actions around prevention, intervention and support.

In NSW, the *NSW Domestic Violence Justice Strategy* guides the justice system to improve and be more proactive, so that victims feel safe and perpetrators are held to account and do not re-offend. The Strategy defines six outcomes for victims and perpetrators:

- victims' safety is secured immediately and the risk of further violence is reduced
- victims have confidence in the justice system and are empowered to participate
- victims have the support they need
- the court process for domestic violence matters is efficient, fair and accessible
- abusive behaviour is stopped and perpetrators are held to account
- perpetrators change their behaviour and re-offending is reduced or eliminated (NSW Attorney General & Justice, 2013, p. 3).

1.2. EVALUATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary focus of this report is the evaluation of the DVDS. The DVDS model is a new concept in Australia, and a number of jurisdictions are looking to the NSW pilot with considerable interest. The Crisis Assistance Service, meanwhile, represents an extension of an existing service model and has been subject to a high level review rather than a full evaluation.

The DVDS evaluation and the review of the Crisis Assistance Service involved both a process and an outcomes component.

The *process* evaluation explored:

- implementation issues and challenges, including the extent to which the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service were implemented as intended
- the nature and purpose of DVDS applications and Crisis Assistance Service call-outs
- the nature of requests outside the scope of the pilot
- feedback on any limits of the DVDS disclosure threshold.

The *outcomes* evaluation investigated:

- the impact of disclosure or non-disclosure on DVDS applicants
- the impact of using the Crisis Assistance Service on service users
- how the specific needs of people from diverse communities had been considered
- satisfaction levels of primary person/third party applicants and clients with the process and assistance provided
- the intersection between the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service and how this has supported victims of domestic violence
- impact and costs to agencies and services that are involved in administration, decision-making and provision of support services
- any unintended consequences for potential victims, perpetrators, police or support services.

The evaluation Terms of Reference did not include a cost benefit analysis, a cost efficiency analysis or an assessment of the scalability of the DVDS or Crisis Assistance Service models. The Terms of Reference initially included an examination of any unintended consequences for perpetrators. However, when developing the evaluation program logic and evaluation methodology, it was decided to exclude assessing unintended consequence for perpetrators. It was considered too problematic to assess unintended consequences for perpetrators given their limited numbers and that the identity of the Persons of Interest and their subsequent contact with the criminal justice system was not available to the evaluation.

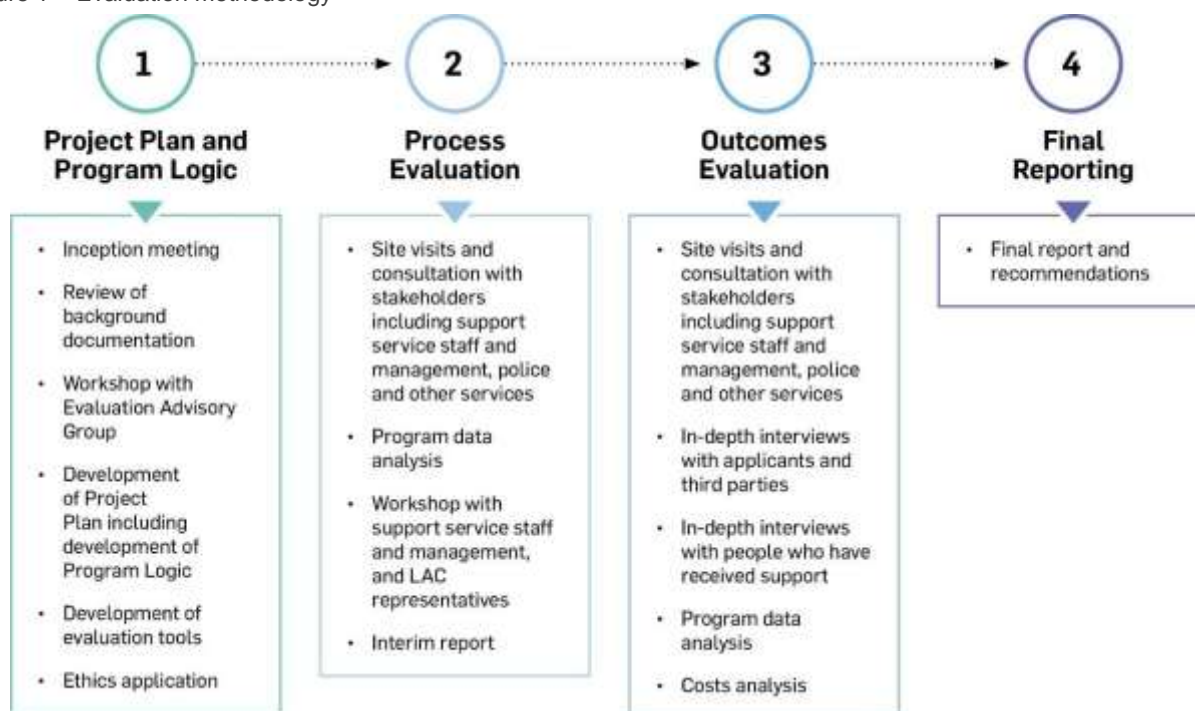
Evaluation Advisory Group

The evaluation was overseen by the DVDS Evaluation Advisory Group which included representatives from the following:

- Women NSW (NSW Ministry of Health to May 2017, Department of Family and Community Services from May 2017)
- Department of Family and Community Services
- Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program (Legal Aid NSW)
- NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (Department of Justice NSW)
- Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence (NSW Ministry of Health, to May 2017)
- Domestic Violence NSW
- Domestic and Family Violence Team NSW Police Force.
- NSW Treasury
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre Inc.
- School of Social Sciences, University of New South Wales.

1.3. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND ACTIVITIES

Figure 1 – Evaluation methodology



The second phase of the evaluation took place between June and November 2017 and included the following evaluation activities:

- In-depth interviews with 16 people who have accessed the DVDS and/or the Crisis Assistance Service.
- Site visits and consultations with managers and staff responsible for promoting and operating the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service in each pilot location.
- Consultations with police representatives from the four LACs participating in the pilots, including Domestic Violence Liaison Officers (DVLOs) and Coordinators and Crime Managers.
- Consultations with external stakeholders including representatives from WDVCAS and other services who have had close involvement with one or both initiatives.
- Analysis of DVDS and Crisis Assistance Service program data
- Analysis of financial data on the cost of operating the two initiatives, and the cost per applicant/client.

All consultations and interviews were conducted using semi-structured discussion guides, which are attached in Appendix A.

Ethics clearance for the evaluation was obtained from Bellberry Limited HREC on 5 April 2017. This timing was in line with the evaluation plan, the analysis of client program data and the conduct of interviews with applicants and clients. A range of strategies were put in place to encourage the safe participation of applicants and clients in the evaluation including information sheets; confidential interviews by telephone at a time of their choosing; the payment of a financial incentive; and a detailed safety protocol.

1.4. EVALUATION DATA SOURCES

The sources of data for the evaluation included the following:

In-depth interviews with pilot program managers and the management and staff in each contracted NGO conducted in two site visits to each location in 2016 and in 2017. These interviews were conducted using a discussion guide attached at Appendix A.

In-depth interviews with police representatives from central office and each of the LACs participating in the pilot conducted in two separate site visits to each location in **2016 and in 2017**. Interviews were conducted with Crime Managers, Domestic Violence Coordinators, and Domestic Violence Liaison Officers. These interviews were conducted using a discussion guide attached at Appendix A.

In-depth interviews with selected stakeholders including representatives from the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS) and local services working with the DVDS and/or the Crisis Assistance Service (e.g. local Aboriginal organisation, local hospital social worker). These interviews were conducted in October and November 2017 using a discussion guide attached at Appendix A.

In depth interviews with DVDS applicants and Crisis Assistance Service clients. These interviews were conducted over a six month period from June to December 2017, using a discussion guide attached at Appendix A. A total of 16 interviews were conducted: 12 DVDS and 6 Crisis Assistance Service clients (with two people using both schemes).

The methodology for involving applicants/clients in the evaluation had to be very carefully considered, taking into account the requirements of the Ethics Approval process, the views of the NGO providers and the police, and most importantly the safety and wellbeing of applicants/clients. Key components of the methodology are detailed below.

- **All applicants participating in the DVDS between April and October 2017 were invited to take part in the evaluation.** This included applicants who were still in contact with the DVDS at the time of recruitment and those who were not. Where the invitation was made to people who had completed their contact with the DVDS in the recent past, the support service made a judgment as to the person's likely safety before contacting them to invite them to take part in the evaluation. A small number of people who had used the Crisis Assistance Service in the same period were also contacted to be interviewed for the evaluation, including those who had used both the crisis service and the DVDS.
- **The invitation to take part in the evaluation was made by the support service.** This was considered the safest and most appropriate approach. Selection bias was avoided through all DVDS applicants in the specified timeframe being approached to take part in the evaluation. Providers were given a recruitment script by Urbis to use when inviting applicants to take part in the evaluation, together with a Participant Information Flyer which set out the nature and purpose of the evaluation, the questions that would be asked, and how the information would be used. They were also provided with a contact at Urbis should they wish to find out more information. Both the script and the flyer stressed the anonymous and confidential nature of the interviews, and that they would be conducted by an independent researcher. Those who agreed to take part in the evaluation signed a consent from which was then forwarded by the provider to Urbis.
- **The invitation to take part in the evaluation occurred once the disclosure meeting had taken place,** and where the support service considered there to be no risk to the applicant or detriment to their wellbeing in being contacted.
- **Urbis then contacted everyone who had consented to take part in the evaluation** to arrange a suitable time and date for an interview. A second stage consent process took place to check that applicants were still willing to be interviewed. The interviews took place one to three months after the disclosure meeting in order to give applicants some time to reflect on their experience with the DVDS and its immediate impacts. With applicant consent, all interviews were taped and transcribed.
- **A \$50 voucher was paid to all applicants interviewed** in recognition of their time and contribution.

NGO expenditure reports

Based on a specific request by the evaluators, this details the expenditure on the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service for the period 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 for each of the providers. See section 1.5 for discussion of financial data limitations.

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data

This data is based on police data analysed and reported by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. It was used to compare the number of crisis assistance calls in each pilot area relative the number of recorded domestic violence incidents. Data was provided for each of the participating LACs for the period April 2016 to September 2017 (the latest available statistics) in relation to the following:

- number of domestic violence incidents
- number of victims involved in the domestic violence incidents
- number of POIs in domestic violence incidents proceeded against.

The DVDS and Crisis Assistance Service program data set

This data set is managed by the contracted NGOs and includes data on a range of variables in relation to each DVDS application. It covers the full period of the pilot operation from 13 April 2016 onwards. The period of data extraction and analysis is 13 April 2016 to 31 October 2017. A summary of the program data used in the evaluation is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 – Summary of program data used

Information Domain	DVDS	Crisis Assistance Service
Primary person demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gender, date of birth, age, Aboriginality, disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gender, date of birth, age, Aboriginality, disability
Current situation (of primary person, and their relationship with the person of interest)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Nature of ongoing contact between primary person and POI▪ Any existing legal activities including current family law court proceedings, family law court orders and ADVOs▪ Whether the primary person is living with the POI▪ Whether there are children living with the primary person and if so their ages▪ Whether FACS is involved with the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Nature of ongoing contact between client and alleged perpetrator▪ Any existing legal activities including current family law court proceedings, family law court orders and ADVOs▪ Whether the primary person is living with the alleged perpetrator▪ Whether there are children living with the primary person and if so their ages▪ Whether FACS was involved with the family
Provider/partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ LAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ LAC
Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Month of application	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Month of crisis call
Services/supports provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Categories of support received from the NGO or through service linkages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Categories of support received from the NGO or through service linkages
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A high level summary of the applicant response, intentions and actions as prepared by the support worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Not included
Relationship between primary person and the POI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Whether the relationship was a current or previous intimate relationship, or another form of relationship▪ Length of the relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ N/A

Information Domain	DVDS	Crisis Assistance Service
DVDS application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application type (primary person/third party); date of application Police station where application was lodged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Third party applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Third party relationship to primary person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Reasons for DVDS application/crisis referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical abuse; sexual abuse; harassment; threats of violence to primary person, children or family; other Summary of concerns for relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical abuse; sexual abuse; harassment; threats of violence to primary person or children or family; other
Disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether a disclosure was made Nature of offences disclosed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Crisis call information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Date, time, police station where call originated
Crisis response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Date, time, location for meeting client
Notes on other information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary of any other relevant information, if applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary of any other relevant information, if applicable

See section 1.5 for discussion of program data limitations.

1.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA

The following limitations of the methodology should be noted:

A relatively modest number of interviews were conducted with applicants/clients.

Various factors led to the lower than anticipated number of interviews:

There was a very limited number of applicants to draw upon. A total of 42 applications were processed by the DVDS across all four pilot areas in the seven month period from April to October 2017, which was the period from which applicants were drawn. Of the 24 participants who signed consents to take part in the evaluation, 16 were subsequently interviewed, 12 of whom had made an application to the DVDS. This represents 29% of the DVDS applicants in the recruitment period and 11% of all DVDS applicants from April 2016 to October 2017.

Not all people who consented to an interview were able to be contacted by Urbis. A balance had to be struck between the desire to obtain an interview, people's privacy and concerns for applicant/client safety. Depending on the preferred mode of contact, a minimum of three emails or texts were sent or up to five phone calls made to contact those who had consented to take part in the evaluation, at their preferred day of the week/time of the day.

Some people who had initially consented to take part in the evaluation subsequently changed their mind when contacted to arrange a suitable time to do the interview. They usually indicated they wanted to 'put all that in the past' and didn't want to talk about it anymore.

The level of contact between the applicant/client and the support service was in many cases relatively fleeting. In some cases, contact was limited to two or three contacts in a two week period - the time it takes to submit a DVDS application and receive the disclosure. Not every applicant needed or wanted contact with the support service: in some cases, there was no face-to-face contact with the support service prior to or after the disclosure meeting. It is challenging to obtain people's consent to an interview when service contact is relatively short.

It is widely acknowledged to be difficult to engage people at risk of domestic violence in research and evaluation for a range of safety, psychological, logistical and other reasons. The greatest success occurs when there has been an opportunity for them to develop a relationship of trust with a provider or other intermediary, who can play a critical role in inviting and encouraging them to take part in an evaluation or research project. While this was undoubtedly the case for some DVDS applicants, it was not necessarily the norm.

It is likely therefore that there is a bias in the interviews conducted towards those who had had a longer relationship/contact with the support service. ***The interviews conducted cannot be considered to be representative of DVDS applicants. The small number of in-depth interviews conducted nevertheless provide valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of certain individuals involved in the pilot.*** This is the first time in-depth interviews have been conducted with applicants in relation to the outcomes and impacts of a DVDS model and so this can be viewed as the beginning of the development of an evidence base that can be built on in future evaluations and research.

There are gaps and limitations in the DVDS and Crisis Assistance Service program data sets.

The NSW Police Force was not required to report any data for the purpose of monitoring the DVDS pilot. While this decision was most likely made to reduce the reporting burden, it left a number of data gaps, most significantly the lack of any data on the number of enquiries made to police about the DVDS and the number of rejected applications (i.e. where the police determined the application did not meet the necessary criteria).

Program data collection was contracted to the NGOs. At the commencement of pilot, a program set was designed by Women NSW and managed and operated by the NGOs. As is the case with all new program data sets, it took some time to 'bed down' the data entry rules, definitions and protocols across the four sites. This task was not made easier by the fact that no data dictionary was developed to guide initial data collection. Despite ongoing discussions between the Department and the NGOs to improve the quality and consistency of data collection. These mainly relate to missing data and inconsistency in the way data items were interpreted and recorded. When presenting data, Urbis has detailed the number and percentage of responses which were 'not recorded' but excluded reporting data fields where the number of 'not recorded' responses was in excess of 20%.

There is a lack of clarity regarding definitions of some data fields (ADVOs in place; the extent to which third parties themselves received some support through the DVDS; the recording of offences disclosed). This means that some descriptive data should be regarded as indicative at this stage: however, there is a high level of confidence in the number of applications and disclosures.

There are limitations in the financial information available on the cost of operating the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service.

The NGOs contracted to manage and operate both the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service were provided with a single combined grant: there was no separate funding allocation for each of the two pilot programs. Nor was there any requirement for the NGOs to report separately on expenditure on the two initiatives. For the purpose of the evaluation, Women NSW on behalf of Urbis, requested each NGO to calculate and report separately on the expenditure on the DVDS and on the Crisis Assistance Service for the previous 12 months (from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017). This task was undertaken by the NGOs retrospectively and restricted to the latest year of operation (in order for the analysis to be based on the most typical year of operation once the programs had moved beyond the initial establishment, planning and promotion period). Each NGO used different expenditure reporting frameworks making it impossible to aggregate program expenditure across the providers. This limited the economic analysis that could be undertaken of the pilots to a calculation of the per case cost based on the NGO expenditure, reflecting the direct cost to government through program funding.). It should therefore be regarded as an indicative cost only.

NSW Police were not provided with additional funds to deliver either the DVDS or the Crisis Assistance Service program and no records were kept by police in relation to operational program costs.

Few external agencies have been directly involved in the DVDS to date.

The design and operation of the DVDS in the pilot phase has been largely confined to the police, the support services and the applicants. As the key stakeholders in the pilot, they are most familiar with and therefore best positioned to comment in detail on how the DVDS has operated in practice and on its impact and outcomes. They also provide an opportunity to triangulate research findings across the three respondent groups. However, the low number of DVDS applications, combined with the very limited number of referrals to the DVDS made through other agencies, meant that few agencies had any contact with or sufficient exposure to the Scheme to inform the evaluation.

2. THE NSW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE SCHEME MODEL

In order to place the evaluation of the DVDS in context, it is important to describe the Scheme and its operation in some detail. Much of the discussion relating to the implementation, outcomes of the Scheme relate to particular aspects of the DVDS model and its Operating Guidelines.

2.1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

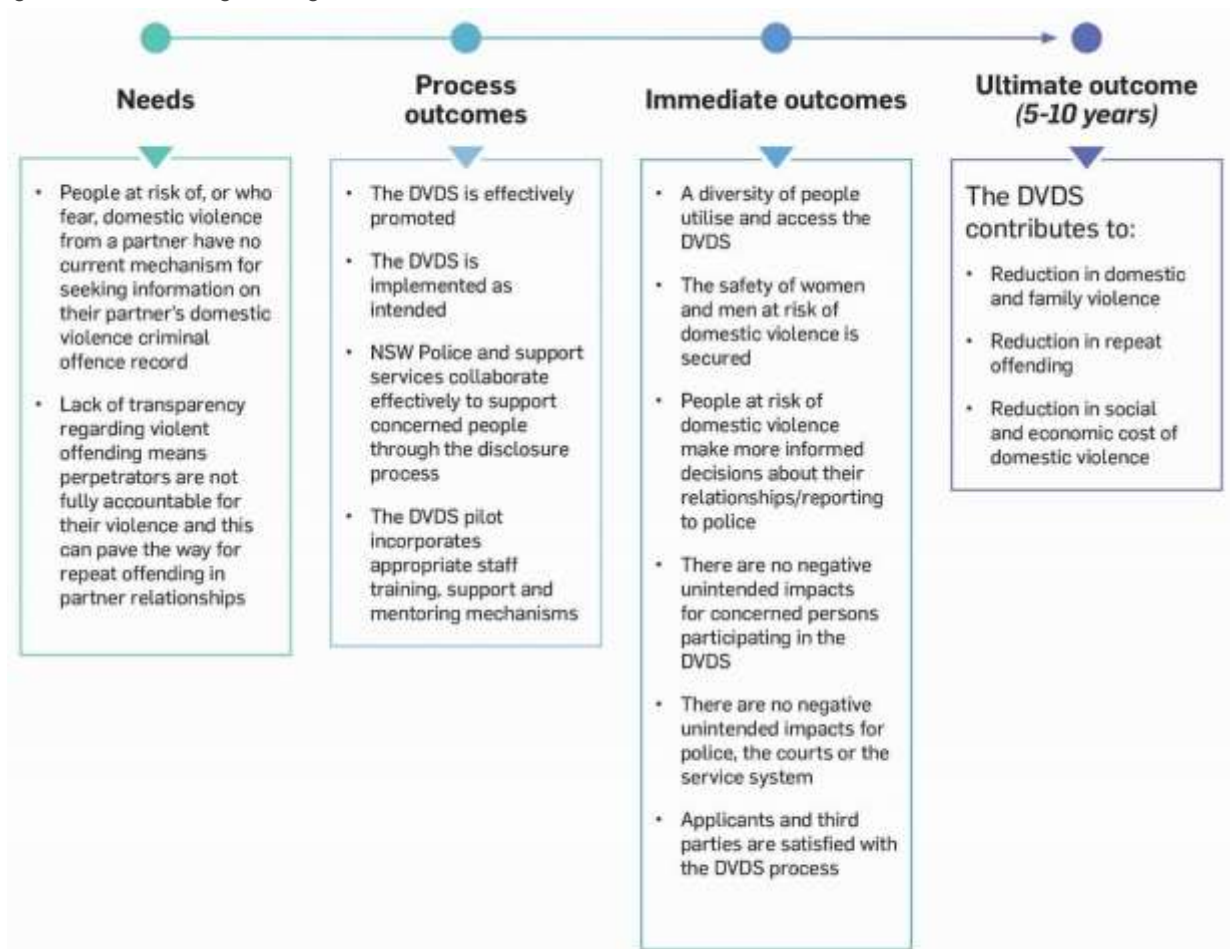
The DVDS is a mechanism to enable a person who has concerns about their current or former partner (or a third party who has concerns about a person's partner) to find out if that partner has a history of domestic violence and related offences. It is designed for both women and men who may be at risk.

The formal objectives of the DVDS are:

- To provide information and support to enable the primary person to make informed choices regarding their relationship and safety.
- To facilitate the primary person's choice to access domestic violence support services prior to (and potentially following) the occurrence of domestic violence within potentially unhealthy or unsafe relationships.
- To provide a robust scheme that is efficient and accessible, and discloses information to a primary person where there are concerns about their relationship.

A program logic for the DVDS is detailed below.

Figure 2 – DVDS Program Logic



2.2. BACKGROUND TO THE DVDS

The NSW DVDS is based on (but does not replicate) a similar United Kingdom model called the Domestic Abuse and Disclosure Scheme, also known as Clare's Law.

Clare Wood was murdered in 2009 by her former partner. It transpired that her ex-partner had prior convictions for harassment and assault of former partners, which included two prison terms. Following his daughter's death, Clare Wood's father campaigned for legislative change to allow domestic violence victims (or people close to them) to have access to police records of domestic violence complaints against their partner. In 2012, the pilot UK Domestic Abuse and Disclosure Scheme was introduced, and then subsequently rolled out in 2014.

In the context of the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform: 2016-2021: Safer Lives for Women, Men and Children* launched in August 2016, the DVDS is designed to support early intervention priorities related to preventing domestic and family violence, intervening early and supporting victims (or people at risk). The Scheme was introduced in recognition of the fact that domestic violence is usually characterised by a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviours. Perpetrators often repeat these behaviours as they move from relationship to relationship. Indeed, domestic violence has the highest recidivism rate of any crime in NSW (NSW Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme Discussion Paper, 2015).

The DVDS aims to contribute to a reduction in domestic violence by providing information to people who may be at risk because of a current or former partner's history. This will allow people to make informed decisions about their relationship and safety, and to seek assistance or undertake safety planning (NSW Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme Discussion Paper, 2015). The DVDS also aims to hold perpetrators to account, and to remove the veil of secrecy regarding prior domestic violence offending that can place women and men at risk in new relationships.

Since the DVDS pilot commenced in NSW, various other jurisdictions in Australia have considered introducing a similar scheme. The most comprehensive investigation of the model was undertaken by the Queensland Law Reform Commission, resulting in their report published in June 2017. That report recommended that Queensland should not introduce a domestic violence disclosure scheme. The main reasons for this recommendation related to:

- the scheme would not address the underlying causes of domestic violence or shift community attitudes, and has the potential to undermine reforms aimed at reducing the onus on the victims to take action or leave
- a view that the disclosure of information alone would not lead to an increase in safety and that the provision of integrated and specialist support is more effective in increasing the safety of a person at risk
- concerns about the extent to which a disclosure scheme would meet the needs of high risk groups
- concerns that a disclosure scheme might give people at risk a false sense of safety when there is no conviction to disclose, given domestic violence is under-reported and only a small proportion of cases result in a conviction
- the lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of a disclosure scheme in reducing domestic violence, improving victim safety and increasing perpetrator accountability
- concerns about the low level of uptake of the schemes in NSW and in New Zealand (which introduced a similar scheme in December 2015)
- the allocation of substantial funding to implement the scheme was not sufficiently justified: available funding would be better directed to supporting frontline services and current domestic and family violence reforms aiming to provide comprehensive, inclusive and systemic responses.

Many of these issues were also raised in extensive consultations conducted in NSW prior to the establishment of the DVDS pilot in April 2016 (see section 2.4 below). In addition, other concerns were raised in NSW about the subject's right to privacy, judicial review and to be aware of how their personal information is being used by government (NSW Government 2015).

However, the report on the outcomes of the NSW consultations identified several aspects of any DVDS pilot model, that it should:

- be simple and accessible, including to people who, at the time of application, prefer not to engage a police response
- be implemented in a partnership between government and non-government agencies to enhance the potential for early intervention with people affected by domestic and family violence
- ensure all DVDS applicants are provided with access to specialist support to assist them to plan for their future safety
- afford NSW public and private sector agencies with the power to disclose sensitive information about a person to a third party
- be subject to careful planning and scrutiny to ensure any benefits of the Scheme outweigh the risks associated with its implementation.

In response to views expressed in the NSW consultations, a number of additional safeguards were put in place in the NSW pilot DVDS. These included:

- a formal risk assessment of the applicant to be undertaken in all cases by police at the time of lodging the DVDS application using the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT)
- the provision of support by an NGO to all applicants at all stages in the process i.e. at the time of making the application, during the disclosure meeting, and after disclosure (including to people where there is no disclosure)
- a partnership model involving the police and experienced domestic violence workers in the operation and management of the Scheme.

Further details about the DVDS pilot model and operations are discussed in sections 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 5.3 and 5.4.

2.3. DVDS MODEL DEVELOPMENT

The development of the DVDS involved extensive consultation. The NSW Government developed a Discussion Paper, requesting responses to guided questions on Clare's Law and options for a NSW model. The Discussion Paper was released on the NSW Government *Have Your Say* website for public comment from 21 May to 19 June 2015. Seventy-five responses were received during this consultation period.

Ministerial roundtable discussions were also convened with government and non-government experts on 28 May 2015 to discuss some of the social and legal considerations of a DVDS. The Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and then Minister for Women, and the then-Attorney General with the support of the then-Premier and then-Deputy Premier, convened the roundtable discussions.

A further four consultation workshops were held with government stakeholders, representatives of Aboriginal communities, representatives of CALD communities and advocates of people with disabilities.

A revised model based on the outline in section 2.2 was endorsed by the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and then-Minister for Women and the then-Deputy Premier and the then-Attorney General on 12 February 2016.

In order for the model to operate, the Department of Justice sought directions under section 41 of the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 and section 62 of the Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 to permit the collection, withholding, use and disclosure of personal information by NSW public sector agencies and contracted service providers that have an identified role in and for the purpose of the DVDS pilot. The directions were made on 13 April 2016 and will expire on 12 April 2018.

2.4. KEY ASPECTS OF THE DVDS

Concerned people make a written application in person at a police station. The NSW Police Force then receive and review the application and undertake criminal record checks to determine whether a relevant conviction exists that requires a disclosure. In accepting the application, the police must be satisfied the person has current contact with the person of interest (either in a relationship or having ongoing contact post-relationship) and the applicant must be able to provide examples of behaviour that warrant a police criminal history check. A risk assessment is undertaken using the DVSAT tool.

Where there is a disclosure to make, the police verbally disclose to the applicant the offence and the date of the conviction. Only criminal convictions can be disclosed.

2.4.1. Eligible persons

Eligible persons include people who feel they may be at risk of domestic violence from a partner or ex-partner (known as the 'primary applicant') or another concerned 'third party'.

The key 'parties' to the DVDS:

- **Primary person**

The person who is in (or has been in) an intimate relationship with the 'subject' and who has concerns about their safety.

The definition of an intimate relationship is broad. It may or may not involve a sexual relationship. It may be between people of the same or different sex, and includes people who are married, engaged, separated, divorced, or in a de facto relationship, as well as couples promised to each other under cultural or religious traditions. It also includes people who are dating – and who have never lived together or been in a more formal relationship.

For former relationships, there needs to be evidence of ongoing or planned contact between the primary person and the 'subject' such as in legal proceedings; family, social or cultural networks; or through business or employment.

- **Third party**

A person who holds concerns for a primary person such as a family member, friend, or professional working with the family or legal guardian.

- **Subject – referred throughout this report as the Person of Interest (POI)**

The person who is (or has been) in an intimate relationship with the primary person and whose history of domestic violence and other relevant offences may be disclosed.

An applicant needs to be an Australian resident, aged over 16 years and live in the participating Local Area Command.

2.4.2. Relevant offences

Relevant offences that can be disclosed	Offences that cannot be disclosed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Personal violence offences committed in a domestic relationship (as defined by the NSW Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007. These include murder, manslaughter, physical and sexual assault, stalking, intimidation and property damage▪ Certain specific personal violence offences committed outside of a domestic relationship – such as sexual assault, child abuse offences, and murder▪ Breaches of Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Offences from jurisdictions outside NSW▪ Offences where no conviction has been recorded▪ Convictions that have become 'spent' (see 5.4.1)▪ Juvenile convictions▪ Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders▪ Any other offence not listed in the relevant offence list.

2.4.3. Application and disclosure process

An application can only be made in person at a police station (restricted to those police stations located in the four trial LACs). Application forms are made available, together with information packs. An applicant may complete the form themselves, or with the assistance of a support person or service who has suggested they may wish to make an application.

When an application is made, the police undertake a risk assessment of the primary person using the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (the DVSA) to identify any threats or serious threats. If a serious threat to the life, health or safety of any person is identified as a result of the assessment, the application is 'fast tracked' and the applicant will be advised of any relevant offence, convictions within 24 to 48 hours.

Under the DVDS Operating Guidelines, the disclosure (or non-disclosure) is to be undertaken within two weeks of the application being made. Police set a time and date for the applicant to be informed of the result of their application.

Where there is a disclosure, it is made:

- verbally by police to the primary person: nothing is provided in writing
- at a police station (or another agreed safe place)
- to the primary person who is accompanied by an expert domestic and family violence worker from the contracted DVDS support service to provide support and help plan for the primary person's safety.

The subject of the application (the POI) is not informed about the application or the disclosure to ensure the safety of the primary person and others. Meanwhile, the person receiving the disclosure (and any other person present) is required to sign an undertaking that they will not misuse any information disclosed. This includes that they agree to not publish or spread the information through social media, family, friendship or other networks, or use the information to stalk or intimidate their current/former partner. They are also advised that it is an offence to provide fake or misleading information in their application.

Where there is no disclosure:

- this is verbally disclosed by police at a police station or other safe place
- the primary person is invited to connect with support services to discuss any relationship concerns.

It is stipulated that non-disclosure *'should not create a fake assurance and applicants will be advised that they should remain vigilant and report any future concerns.'* (NSW Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme www.women.nsw.gov.au)

A flow chart illustrating the DVDS application and disclosure process is at Figure 3.

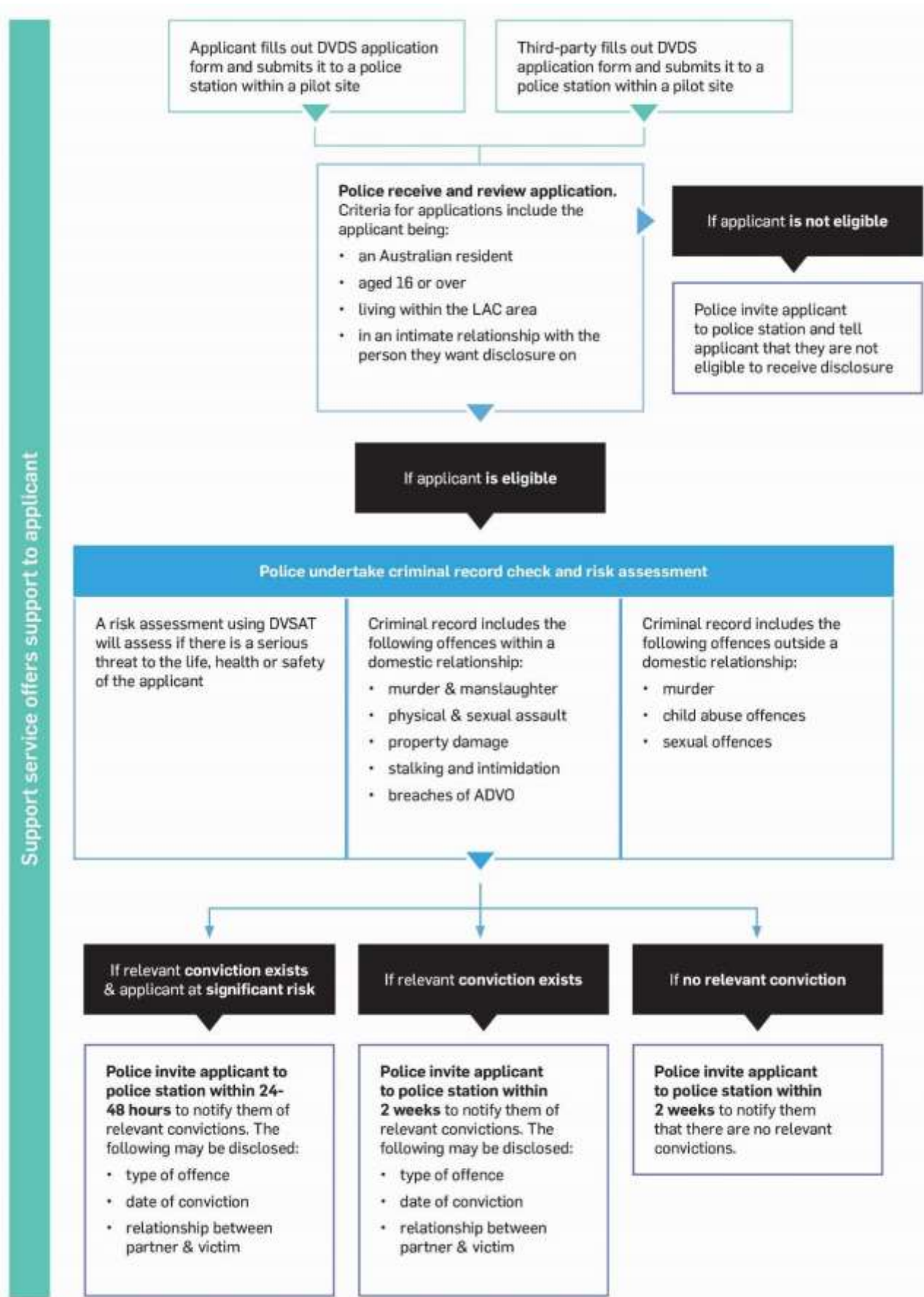
2.5. THE ROLE AND SCOPE OF THE DVDS SUPPORT SERVICE

A critical feature of the DVDS is the partnership between the NSW Police Force and NGOs funded to provide specialist domestic and family violence support in the four pilot LACs. **The primary role of the contracted NGOs is to offer support to all primary persons involved in an application, to work alongside police during the disclosure process, and to offer support post-disclosure. A support worker from the NGO must attend the disclosure meeting with applicants at the police station.** Applicants are free to take up the offer of support while their application is being processed or after the disclosure meeting has taken place.

Three support services were contracted to work closely with the four LACs to engage, assess and support DVDS applicants. This includes supporting applicants to make an application where needed, being present when disclosures are made, providing intake and assessment and linking to other services such as counselling, legal and/or court support, parenting support, accommodation, housing, financial and other necessary supports.

The support services' scope also includes working closely with the NSW Police Force and Local Coordination Points (LCPs) and referring to Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVACSs) under the NSW Government Domestic Violence Justice Strategy, where appropriate.

Figure 3 – DVDS application and disclosure process



2.6. ESTABLISHMENT AND FUNDING OF THE DVDS PILOTS

A two-year pilot of the DVDS was launched in April 2016. A commitment of \$2.3 million was made for the NSW Police Force partnership with non-government organisation (NGO) support services to operate both the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service. An allocation of \$250,000 per year was made available to the NGOs in each of the four pilot sites (totalling \$2 million over two years) with the remaining \$300,000 allocated to a centralised fund for operational and set-up costs including: training, administrative functions, communications activities and the evaluation. The pilots officially commenced on 13 April 2016 for a two year period.

The DVDS pilot was undertaken in the following four LACs in NSW:

- Oxley
- Shoalhaven
- Sutherland
- St George.

The selection of pilot sites was based on the following criteria:

- a mix of metropolitan and regional sites
- service system capacity
- one site with a significant culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) population
- one site with a significant Aboriginal population
- the impact on Police LACs in light of existing domestic violence and other reforms and initiatives being rolled out at the same time.

3. DVDS UTILISATION AND ACCESS

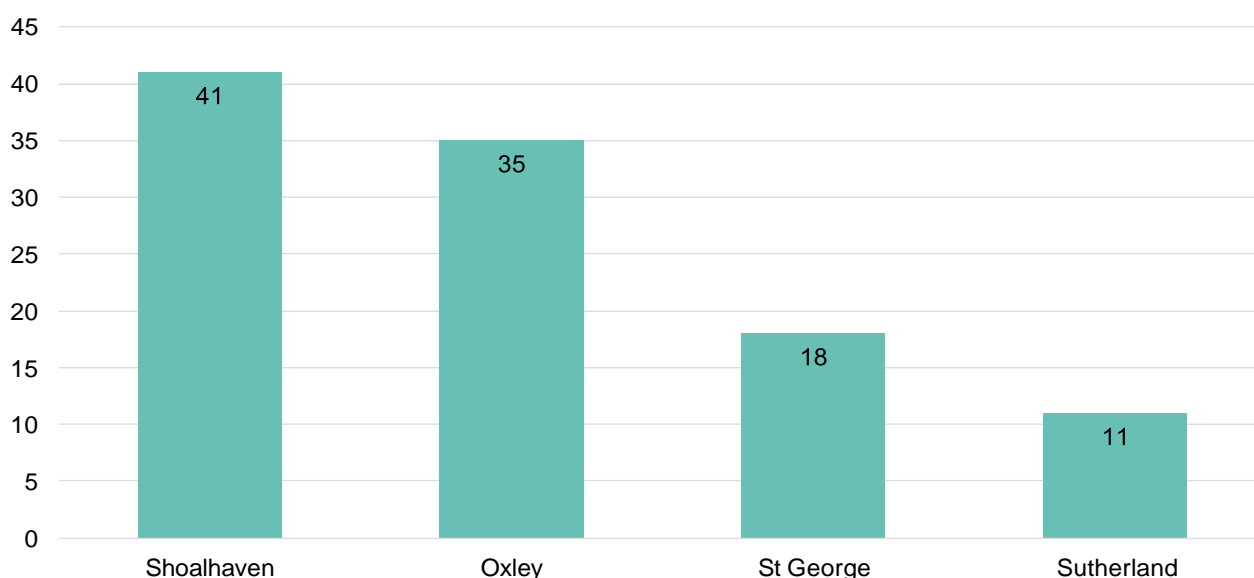
3.1. INTRODUCTION

The following analysis is based on information extracted from the DVDS program data set (as previously discussed in Section 1) which amongst other things records information on the number of applications by location; nature and duration of the relationship between the applicant and the POI; the profile of applicants; and the main reasons for applying to the Scheme. It also includes qualitative data from in depth interviews with police, NGO representatives and applicants. The applicants interviewed included one male, people who were living with the POI and those who were not, as well as people who received a disclosure and those who did not. Only one third party was interviewed despite efforts to gain consents from this small group.

3.2. NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS BY LOCATION

A total of 105 applications were administered by the DVDS from mid-April 2016 to 31 October 2017. The number of applications varied across the LACs, from 11 in Sutherland to 41 in Shoalhaven LAC (see Figure 4). The bulk of the applications were made to a few police stations: DVDS applications were processed by only a third of the police stations across the four LACs. Smaller regional stations, and those that did not operate seven days a week, did not administer any DVDS applications.

Figure 4 – Number of DVDS applications by LAC: April 2016 to October 2017



Applications were fairly evenly spread over the pilot period, with an average of five to six applications per month across all pilots (See Figure 5). There is little evidence of any significant increase in the number of applications over time as the DVDS became more established. This holds for all LACs, except Oxley which experienced an increase in the six months from April to September 2017 (See Figure 6). This seems to relate to a concerted effort by that LAC to increase the number of applications after a DVDS workshop in July 2017. This seems to have been achieved through working closely with local service networks.

As at the outset of the pilot, no targets were set for the number of DVDS applications, it is difficult to comment on whether 105 applications is lower or higher than anticipated.

However, on the face of it, the number of applications is relatively low. It would be reasonable to expect that applications to the DVDS would increase over time as the Scheme became more widely known. This has not eventuated.

Figure 5 – Number of DVDS applications per month mid-April 2016 to October 2017

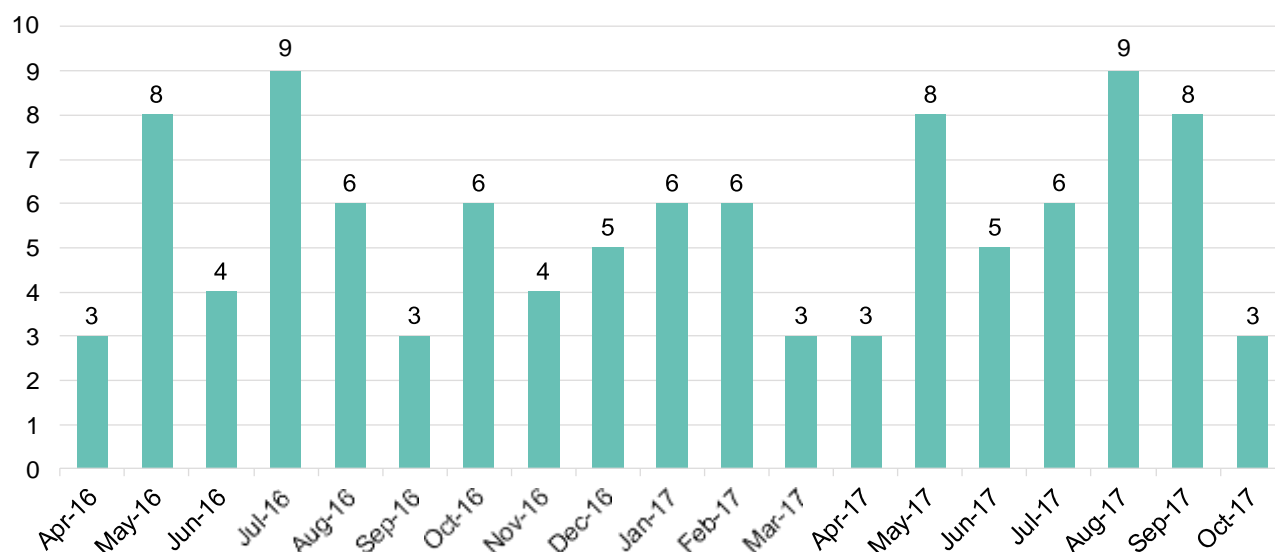
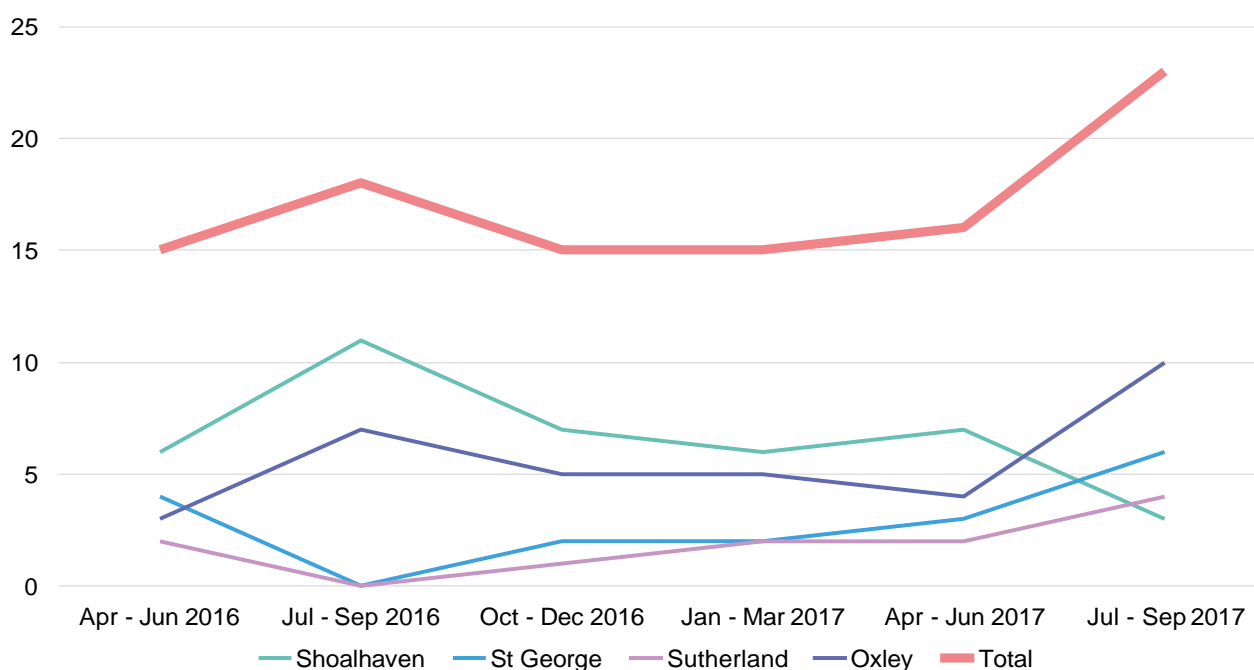


Figure 6 – Number of DVDS applications in each quarter by LAC, April 2016 to October 2017



3.3. NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS REJECTED

Police are required to undertake an assessment of the validity of a DVDS application prior to undertaking criminal records check on the POI. To date, there has been no requirement upon police to keep a record of applications that are not progressed and this has been a major gap in the available data for the evaluation. In addition, an unknown number of applicants may have attended the police station to enquire about the DVDS and encountered a police officer who was unaware of the DVDS or of how to take an application. It has not been possible to quantify this.

A small number of DVDS applications were recorded by the support services as rejected: that is, the NSW Police Force determined there were insufficient grounds for making the application. This figure mainly relates to applications made with the assistance of the support service. In interviews, some support services said they had assisted a number of applicants make what they considered to be a legitimate application, but the police did not accept them as they did not think they met the eligibility criteria.

In interviews, various reasons were provided by police and NGOs for applications being rejected:

- Insufficient evidence for the safety concern: as one officer reported *'I was told it was a gut feeling: that's not enough.'*
- The applicant was not considered to be at risk: as the POI had been incarcerated.
- The relationship to the POI was deemed by police not to be intimate.
- Concerns about applicant motivations, especially applicants involved in family law proceedings. Police reportedly advised such applicants they could obtain more information about their former partner's criminal history through family law proceedings than the DVDS, and referred them accordingly.
- Police were unconvinced of the need for an application involving a person who had been in a relationship with the POI for a long time: she did not fit the early intervention target.

As noted previously, at times police and support services disagreed about some eligibility assessments, particularly regarding whether the applicant had good reason to have safety concerns. The NGOs expressed the view that, given their extensive experience working in domestic violence, they were sometimes more attuned than police to the risk factors: they felt the bar had been set too high in relation to the provision of evidence to support safety concerns. Police, on the other hand, sometimes questioned the motivations behind some applications generated from the NGO providing DVDS support, questioning whether some were being submitted to increase numbers.

In considering this feedback, it would be beneficial in any future roll out of the DVDS:

- to further clarify with all parties (police and support services) the nature and level of detail required from applicants to substantiate the safety concern they have about the POI that has triggered the application
- to support police to fully understand the wide range of 'danger signals' that indicate a person may be at risk of domestic violence beyond threats of or actual violence when assessing safety concerns
- to clarify the range of circumstances where the DVDS may be of assistance to the applicant including where they are not in the early stages of a relationship (see later discussion regarding the targeting of the Scheme).

3.4. APPLICANT PROFILE

The great majority of accepted DVDS applications (81%) were made by the primary person, 19% were made by a third party.

The key demographics of the primary person applicants (including those on whose behalf an application was made by a third party) are detailed on the following page.

The DVDS is being used both by primary persons who are in a current relationship with the POI (42%) and by those who are no longer in a relationship with their ex-partner (49%) [9% unknown].

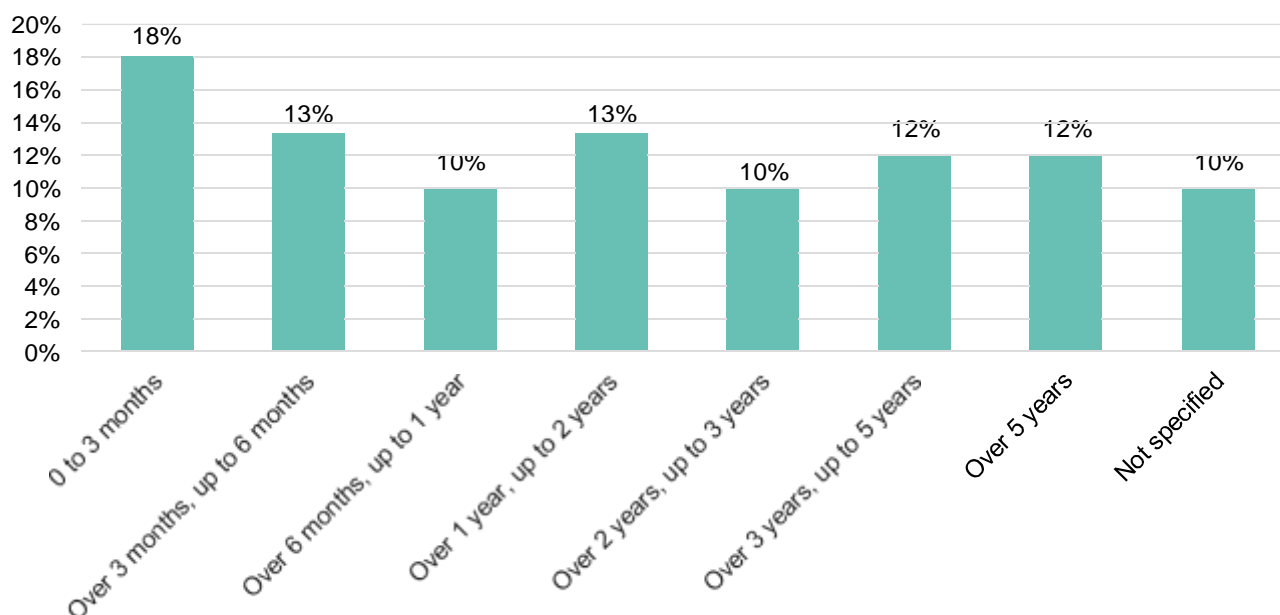
The duration of the relationship between the primary person and the POI varies greatly, from less than three months to over five years (see Figure 6). Although many relationships were of relatively short duration (31% six months or less), almost half (48%) of the primary persons had been in a relationship with the POI for a year or longer, and 25% for over three years. This suggests that the DVDS is being used by people in a range of relationship contexts, and not only by those who are in the relatively early stages of a relationship.

This is confirmed when we examine the living relationships and family contexts. At the time of the application, around one in four primary persons were living with the POI (21% full time; 5% some of the time). The majority (59%) of applicants had children living with them and three were pregnant at the time of the application.

Significantly, a substantial proportion of the primary person applicants had taken legal action against the POI. Two out of five primary persons had an ADVO in place against the POI. Family Court Orders were in place in 9% of cases, and there was reported NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) involvement in a further 9% of cases.

This data clearly indicates that a substantial proportion of DVDS applicants are not in the early stages of a relationship with the POI. As such, they do not fit with the intention of the DVDS as an early intervention initiative. The discussion later in this section examines the range of potential reasons for this as well as some unintended consequences.

Figure 7 – Duration of relationship between primary person and POI (percentages rounded)



3.5. REASONS FOR MAKING THE APPLICATION

Threats of violence (38%) and physical abuse (39%) are the most common reasons for applying to the DVDS, followed by harassment (24%), threats of violence to family (11%), sexual abuse (7%) and threats of violence to children (3%).

While this pattern was broadly similar for both primary person and third party applicants, third party applicants were somewhat more likely to indicate physical abuse as the primary motivation for making an application to the DVDS (see Table 2).

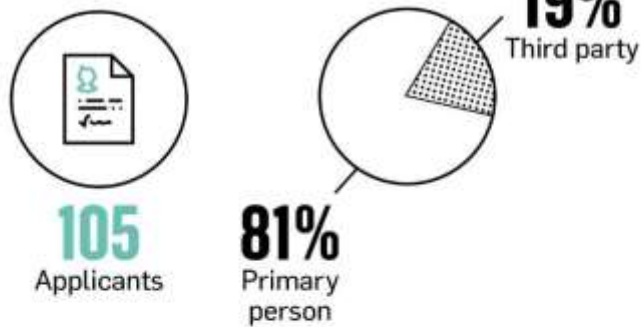
Table 2 – Reasons for making a DVDS application (multiple response)

Reason for application	Primary Person applications (n=85)	Third Party applications (n=20)	All applications (n=105)
Physical abuse	38%	45%	39%
Threats of violence to primary person	41%	25%	38%
Harassment	26%	15%	24%
Threats of violence to family	9%	20%	11%
Sexual abuse	7%	5%	7%
Threats of violence to children	4%	0%	3%

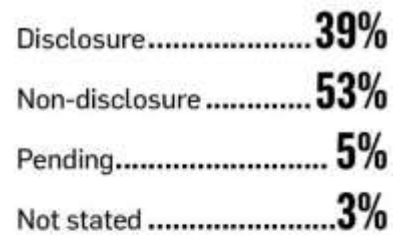
The interviews with DVDS applicants provide further detail on specific motivations for making an application. In general, applicants said they wanted to see if their partner/ex-partner had any past history to help them make a decision about their relationship. The range of circumstances of the applicants is reflected in these comments, which reveal motivations that go beyond concerns relating to a new relationship.

Figure 8 – Summary of DVDS applications mid-April 2016 – October 2017

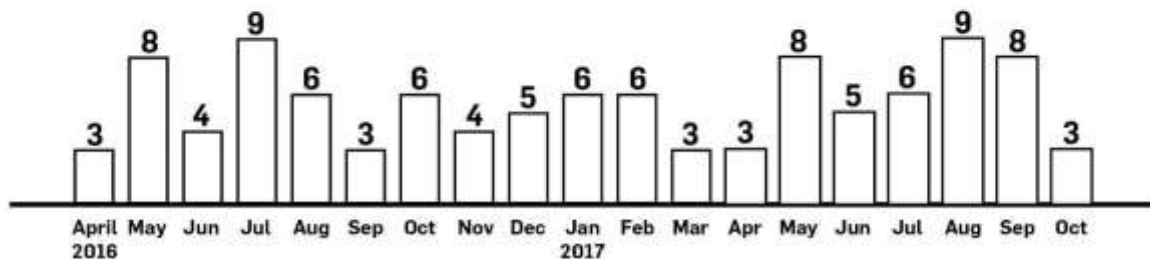
Applicants



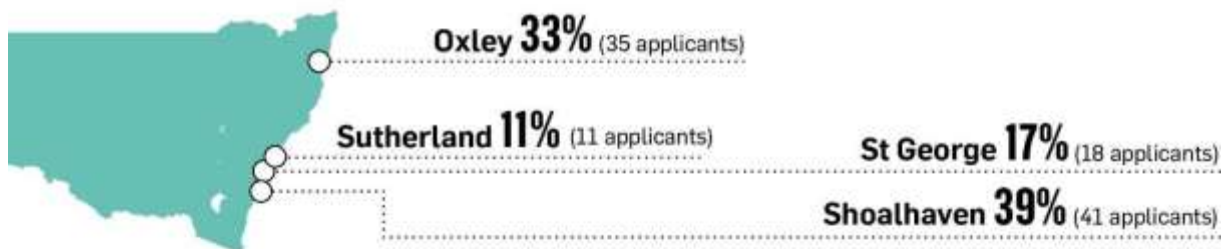
Disclosure outcomes



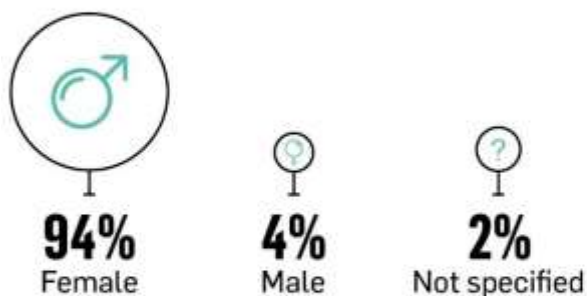
Applicants per month



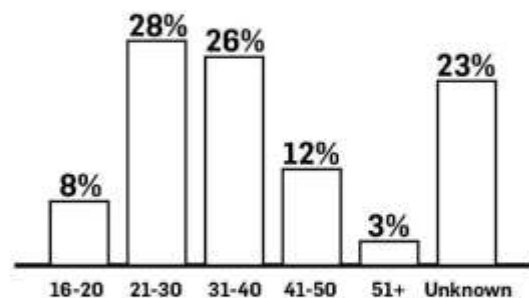
Applicants by LAC



Gender



Age



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



ADVOs



Table 3 – Applicants' motivation for making an application

Motivation	Detail	Example
Confirmation that their experience is consistent with previous behaviour	Some applicants were looking for validation that their partner, or ex-partner had displayed similar behaviour in previous relationships.	<i>If he's been violent once, I'm pretty sure it's not just once in his life that he's been violent.</i>
Checking a new partner's background based on previous experience of abusive relationships	Some applicants had experienced abusive relationships in the past and wanted to avoid this in the future. They saw the DVDS as an opportunity to 'check out' a new partner before getting further involved in the relationship.	<i>Because I have got a history of partners with domestic violence and I didn't want to go through that again.</i>
Confirming that the abuse that they have experienced is not their fault and that their concerns are valid	Some applicants wanted to find out (after their partner/ex-partner had become abusive) whether or not this was a one-off incident or indicative of a pattern of behaviour. Some applicants were looking to confirm that they were not responsible or to blame for the abuse they had experienced. They were looking for insights into the POI's past behaviour to see if there was a history of abuse.	<i>I actually started to believe in myself that no, it's not my issue, It's actually his issue.</i>
Make decisions about certain aspects of the relationship and be safe	Some applicants were hoping to find information to support certain decisions about their relationship. For some, it was deciding if they should move in with their partner. For others, it was deciding to leave their partner, or to completely sever contact them. Other applicants who had separated from their partner were concerned about the safety of their children, especially during visitation arrangements.	<i>Just to give me that confidence to stay away from him I guess, and not being sucked in and just yeah just because I've got young children as well. Just to make them safe as well I guess. So in the event of any other future incidents, that I was aware of what had happened in the past and what could possibly happen in the future.</i>

3.6. POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO ACCESSING THE DVDS

A number of barriers were identified as impacting negatively on access to and utilisation of the DVDS. These included factors relating to the design of the DVDS, its implementation, the complex nature of domestic violence, and a range of geographic and cultural barriers.

Table 4 – Potential barriers to accessing the DVDS

Statement	Potential reason
The DVDS is a brand new concept and it will take time to gain traction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New ideas take time: the pilots have been operating for a relatively short period and more time is needed for the Scheme to take hold. ▪ DVDS is still an 'untested' concept – people need to see and understand the benefit in concrete terms, rather than in theory.
The current application process (in person at a police station) is a major access barrier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attending a police station is highly problematic for people who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have never before had contact with the criminal justice system - for various reasons are fearful of the police (e.g. new migrants, refugees, and those with previous negative experiences) - are concerned about privacy and confidentiality (e.g. in regional areas or local communities where they may be seen by people they know). ▪ People who are employed or who look after children, who live some distance from a police station, and/or who have limited travel options may lack the time or otherwise have difficulty in attending a police station.
Limited awareness by some police officers of the DVDS or of how to take an application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notwithstanding DVDS training of all police officers in pilot LACS at the commencement of the pilot, the low number of applications and the high level of staff turnover of General Duties Officers results in limited awareness of, and little if any contact with, the DVDS. ▪ Services and applicants report some applicants attending police stations to lodge an application but have not been able to do so (e.g. the police officer on duty at the desk was not sure what to do and the applicant was asked to return at a later date). ▪ The role of taking an application has often fallen to the Police Domestic Violence Liaison Officer (DVLO). However, they are not always free to assist applicants as they have many duties to perform. Furthermore, their work hours are 9 to 5, Monday to Friday and so they are not available to assist applicants outside these hours or on weekends.
The pilot status of the DVDS has hampered broader promotion and marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The pilot was restricted to four LACs which meant only local promotion and communication activities could be undertaken.
There has been insufficient engagement or cooperation with key groups in the community to raise awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There was criticism by some stakeholders that some support services have not engaged sufficiently, effectively or strategically with existing services or networks. ▪ There were suggestions that funding tensions or rivalries in the local service sector has impeded referrals to the DVDS in some locations.
Poor targeting of 'hard to reach' communities – including CALD communities and Aboriginal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although opinions on this vary, some stakeholders were of the view that some of the NGOs had failed to tap into existing networks to reach CALD communities. ▪ Whilst NGOs talked of extensive promotion to, and contact with networks, this was not always visible or evident to other stakeholders consulted.

Statement	Potential reason
Early communications and marketing 'missed the mark' in terms of content, targeting and timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited social marketing expertise among NGOs may have been a contributing factor to difficulties experienced in communicating a new concept to a new target group. The DVDS promotional material prepared for the pilot included wording which is not likely to resonate with people who have not experienced domestic violence and/or who do not define themselves in these terms. Much of the marketing and promotion activities undertaken by NGOs in the initial stages focussed on the service sector rather than on the broader community, which should have been a key target for the early intervention Scheme. Since the interim report in July 2017 where this matter was raised, one pilot area has developed its own promotional material using different language but this has not as yet led to an increase in applications. Other strategies such as placing posters in public toilets, shopping centres, GP surgeries, local clubs, hairdressers, nail salons etc have not led to an increase in applications from the broader community. Targeting and marketing to 'third parties' may have had less priority than to primary persons, and has generated few applications: it requires a specific focus and approach.
The rate of referrals to and the use of the DVDS by the service sector has been low, despite a positive response to the Scheme initially	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The DVDS is not 'top of mind' for busy service providers for whom other activities (e.g. making sure the person has housing, or legal support or counselling) take priority. Some do not fully understand the Scheme and how it works in practice. Most services have yet to see specific DVDS outcomes or benefits: it therefore remains an abstract concept at this stage – reflecting the low numbers and limited evidence to date. Some providers see little point in applying to the DVDS as the 'primary person' is considered too far down the domestic violence track and/or is already aware of their partner's previous violent offending.

There is further discussion of some of these issues in section 5.

3.7. ACCESS TO THE DVDS BY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

3.7.1. Aboriginal applicants

Over one in seven (15%) of the DVDS applicants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This is an over-representation relative to the Aboriginal population: however, Aboriginal communities experience significantly higher rates of domestic violence than the general population. Additionally, one of the pilot sites was selected based on the significant Aboriginal population.

Various strategies were used by the support services to inform and engage members of the Aboriginal community about DVDS. This mainly involved working closely with local Aboriginal organisations and with people employed in mainstream services with specific responsibility for liaising with the Aboriginal community.

Although the sample is small, the pilot does suggest that some Aboriginal people are willing to use the DVDS. However, more research would be required to understand the role the DVDS has played in any decision-making or action for this cohort.

In consultations, various reasons were identified as potentially impacting on Aboriginal people accessing the DVDS, particularly in regional communities and in communities with a large Aboriginal population. The principal barrier is the requirement to attend a police station to make an application and to attend the disclosure meeting. This is a barrier for Aboriginal people who are fearful of the police, who have had negative experiences with them in the past, and/or who have concerns about confidentiality (i.e. they risk

being seen by a member of their community going into the police station). To address this barrier, in one LAC, the police started to hold the disclosure meeting with Aboriginal applicants in a nearby Aboriginal community organisation, and this was well received by the local community.

It was suggested that, in some Aboriginal communities, there is less need to use the DVDS. This is because 'everybody knows everybody' and a person's domestic violence history is less likely to be 'hidden' than in other communities due to the close-knit nature of Aboriginal community and family networks.

3.7.2. Applicants from CALD backgrounds

Until recently, no program data was collected on the CALD background of DVDS applicants. Data started to be collected from 1 July 2017, but a longer period is required before an accurate picture begins to emerge of the extent which people from CALD backgrounds are using the Scheme.

Feedback from consultations indicated there are mixed views about how successfully the DVDS has engaged with CALD communities to promote and support use of the Scheme. According to support services, efforts have been made to engage with CALD agencies as a conduit to members of the community. Such agencies are represented on interagency committees and attend interagency meetings and so have benefited from DVDS briefings and information sessions. However, all support services said they deliberately 'held off' promoting the DVDS vigorously in CALD communities until they had received translated materials on the Scheme from FACS. The translated versions of the DVDS collateral did not become available until well into the second year of the pilot. This has reportedly hindered the promotion of the scheme to CALD communities.

Nevertheless, in the view of several stakeholders, some support services could have done much more to engage with CALD community organisations and stakeholders. They asserted there is a very low level of awareness of the DVDS in CALD communities; there is very low visibility of the strategies being used by the support services to engage with CALD organisations; and that in one case, the support service had failed to take advantage of existing networks and positions that would have been well-placed to partner with the support service to effectively 'get the message out' about the DVDS to the CALD communities. They say CALD community organisations they have spoken to have been surprised to learn of the Scheme, and been keen to find out more. The view was expressed that some support services lack the skill or networks to engage effectively with CALD communities.

Although it is difficult to determine where the truth lies in these varying accounts, the fact that there is a perception among some stakeholders that the CALD engagement strategy has been poorly implemented in some cases is telling. A more systematic and partnership approach to targeting CALD communities is needed, as well as more information about CALD applicants' experiences of the DVDS.

3.7.3. Applicants with a disability

A total of 12 DVDS applicants identified as having a disability. This represents 11% of all applicants (in 12% of cases, there is no record of whether or not the applicant had a disability). This is low given that 18.3% of the general population report having a disability (ABS, 2016).

Relatively little information is available about the extent to which this specific group has accessed or been supported by the DVDS. In a couple of cases, it is known that the applicant was applying to the DVDS in relation to their carer. These cases are obviously very complex. Given the very small number of applications involving applicants with a disability and the lack of data, more research would be required to shed light on their specific experiences and outcomes from the DVDS. Only one specific comment was made by a support service in relation to the issue. They said they had approached a disability organisation to offer a briefing on the DVDS but had been refused as the service did not see the relevance of the Scheme for their client group. This highlights some potential attitudinal or knowledge barriers, as well as the difficulty in explaining a Scheme 'in the abstract'. This suggests promoting the Scheme effectively will rely on strategic targeting of specific communities and concrete examples of the Scheme to 'bring it to life'.

3.7.4. Applicants identifying as LGBTIQI

There is no specific information available on access and utilisation of the scheme by people identifying as LGBTIQI. No program data is available on this group, and no specific issues were raised in consultations, other than there is always a need to 'do more' promotion and engagement with groups who may face specific barriers in accessing any new service. In consultations, support services said they had engaged with LGBTIQI groups to promote the DVDS but to date had not received any applications from a person in a same sex relationship. More research is required to shed light on any specific barriers or issues relating to LGBTIQI members of the community accessing or benefiting from the DVDS.

3.7.5. Local community factors

The four pilot areas varied not only in terms of demographics and the local service system, but also in relation to other local factors considered to be important in explaining the differential usage of the DVDS across the four regions.

People residing in regional locations face many challenges in accessing the DVDS. Limited access to transport; the fact that police stations in very small communities are only staffed several days of the week; and a higher risk of being seen and having to explain why they are attending a police station in small towns make accessing the scheme more challenging than in other communities. On the other hand, the smaller population and the relatively close-knit nature of the local service system in regional areas has reportedly made it easier to get the 'message out' about the DVDS. The prevailing view is, that in the regional areas, the local service system and the broader community have been saturated with information about the DVDS, but this has not always translated into applications

A number of specific challenges in accessing the DVDS were also identified in metropolitan LACs. In one LAC area, the large size of the local population and the multitude of communities and services located within it made it difficult to promote the DVDS or get 'traction' with the local service system. Another metropolitan LAC was variously described as 'a little bit close-minded', 'a very closed community', 'an insular place' where 'you just don't air your dirty laundry' or be seen walking into a police station. This cultural characteristic of this community is reflected not only in the low number of DVDS applications, but also in the relatively low rate of domestic violence incidents per 100,000 population (compared with other pilot sites) reported to police in the Local Government Area (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 2018). Such factors again highlight the problem of only being able to access the DVDS through attending a police station in person.

4. DVDS OUTCOMES

4.1. APPLICATION OUTCOMES

During the review period, there were a total of 105 DVDS applications. Just over half (53%) DVDS applications did not result in a disclosure. Over one in three (39%) did involve a disclosure and the outcomes of the remaining (8%) were still pending or did not have an outcome recorded as at 31 October 2017.

Out of the 97 applications with a known outcome, 42% resulted in a disclosure. This can be considered a reasonably high rate of disclosure given that it is known only a very small proportion of domestic violence perpetrators are convicted of a domestic violence offence.

The types of offences disclosed most commonly involved a range of offences classified as 'Other' (e.g. property, ADVO breaches, stalking and intimidation) in a domestic violence context (90% of all disclosures).

The types of offences most frequently disclosed were classified as 'against justice procedures' (49% of applications resulting in disclosure), followed by non-domestic violence assaults (44%). Significantly, 41% of disclosures involved a domestic violence assault, and 7% sexual offences other than sexual assault, including child pornography offences and sexual intercourse with a child under 14 years of age. For nine out of ten applications resulting in disclosure, the 'other' category of offences was also selected, however it appears this category was used to provide further details on the disclosure, rather than to identify other types of offences.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to further analyse the precise nature of the offences disclosed under the 'other' and 'against justice procedures' categories. It should be noted that these offence categories were entered and coded by support services after the (verbal) disclosure meeting with the police: there is therefore potential for miscoding. Although police keep records of each application and disclosure, there was no requirement for them to set up a separate DVDS reporting system and so any data search to obtain more detail of the offences disclosed would have to be done manually. If the Scheme is rolled out to other locations, it would be important to improve the data capture relating to this information.

Table 5 – Offences disclosed

Offence disclosed	Primary Person disclosures (n=33)	Third Party disclosures (n=8)	All disclosures (n=41)
Against justice procedures	52%	38%	49%
Non-DV assault	45%	38%	44%
DV assault	42%	38%	41%
Harassment/ threatening behaviour/ private nuisance	33%	25%	32%
Other sexual offences	6%	13%	7%
Sexual assault	0%	0%	0%

4.2. SUPPORT PROVIDED

The majority of DVDS applicants received assistance from the support service. In all, 80% of the applicants received support. The level and type of support provided to applicants was the same, regardless of whether there was a disclosure.

This suggests the Scheme is playing a role supporting applicants whether or not there is a relevant offence to disclose. This is important given that, according to police, there were sometimes indications of past violent behaviour in the POI's criminal record that could not be disclosed under the DVDS, and which could have implications for the applicant's safety.

Safety planning (55%), referrals to counselling (19%) and assistance with completing a DVDS application (16%) were the most common types of assistance provided (see Table 5). Primary person applicants also received various other forms of support (financial, housing, transport, accommodation) and referral (legal services, child health, crisis accommodation). It should be noted there is uncertainty in some cases as to whether the assistance provided in third party applications related to the person considered to be at risk, the third party, or both. This is another element of program data capture that could be improved in any future roll out of the DVDS. It is not possible to quantify the number of applicants who had been receiving support prior to applying to the DVDS.

Table 6 – Types of assistance provided to DVDS applicants (multiple response)

Assistance provided	Primary Person applicants (n=85)	Third Party applicants (n=20)	Total applicants (n=105)
Safety planning	58%	45%	55%
Referral to counselling	21%	10%	19%
Assistance completing an application	18%	10%	16%
Referral to legal services	9%	10%	10%
Financial assistance	9%	0%	8%
Housing assistance	8%	0%	7%
Transport	5%	0%	4%
Referral to crisis accommodation	2%	0%	2%
Referral to child health team	0%	5%	1%

4.3. SERVICE RECORDED OUTCOMES

Support service assessments of the outcomes were obtained through analysing the 'narrative' on outcomes specified in the program data set (comments were written in relation to 92 of the 105 applicants) and from consultations with support services. Key outcomes are detailed in Table 7 overleaf according to theme.

A few applicants were reportedly not happy with the disclosure and 'denied' the violence. One or two indicated they were *afraid* to take any action following the disclosure as the POI continued to harass, intimidate or stalk them.

In a few cases involving a third party application, the primary person did not want any contact with the support service and did not want to be involved in the disclosure, usually because they viewed the third party applicant as interfering.

A number of applicants said they did not need or want any support post-disclosure but they knew where they could go to should they change their mind or need some advice or support in the future.

Table 7 – DVDS outcomes recorded by support services

Outcome	Examples
Applicants have been linked into support services when required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accessing housing ▪ Accessing counselling ▪ Accessing Centacare programs ▪ Accessing parenting support programs ▪ Accessing legal aid ▪ Accessing children's services
Applicants have indicated their intention to end the relationship with the POI, or leave them if they are living together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning to end the relationship and all contact ▪ Ending the relationship completely ▪ Contemplating leaving the relationship
Applicants took legal action or strengthened orders already in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applying for a private ADVO ▪ Applying for an ADVO ▪ Strengthening existing ADVOS ▪ Resisting requests to vary (weaken) an existing ADVO ▪ Making a statement or complaint to police about a prior criminal matter
Applicants have moved/relocated to improve their safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moving to another house in the same area ▪ Relocating out of the area ▪ Making plans to relocate to another State
Applicants used the information to confirm/stand resolute in their decision to end or leave the relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sticking with a decision to end or leave a relationship ▪ Gaining confidence to end the relationship ▪ Deciding to cease contact with the POI
Applicants have taken other steps to improve their safety including how to leave the relationship safely, and/or improve her safety, changing locks at her home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Obtaining information about relevant emergency numbers ▪ Changing the locks of their home ▪ Receiving support through domestic violence services ▪ Engaging in safety planning

4.4. OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED BY APPLICANTS INTERVIEWED

A total of 12 DVDS applicants were interviewed in-depth for the evaluation of the DVDS. While the number is modest, the stories are rich. They confirm and add more detail and understanding about the outcomes identified by service providers. The outcomes for applicants were varied but, in general, they can be grouped into being assisted in making decisions about their relationship and gaining access to services and supports.

Interestingly, even applicants who did not get a disclosure or did not learn any information that they did not already know, found that going through the DVDS had influenced their decisions or provided access to supports that they would be unlikely to have received otherwise.

I hadn't really got answers to what I was looking for, really good solid evidence. But I got some information and I got help for myself and directions for the future in what I could do. That was something.

It did influence the decisions I made because it made me realise what I was complaining about. Even though there was no information given to me about anything that had happened, it made me realise that what I had reported and that my concerns were valid, and it is something that I should be mindful of. So it was good to hear that from the police and yeah, it was good. It has made my decisions since more sensible, and a little bit more cautious or protective, yeah.

4.4.1. Clarity and decisions about their relationship

The most common outcome of the disclosure was that the applicant felt validated they were not responsible for the abuse they had received as they found out their partner/ex-partner had acted in similar ways in the past. This was a particularly empowering realisation for applicants who had been told by their partner that the abuse they were experiencing was their fault or a result of their actions.

I just always knew that it couldn't possibly be me and then I heard stories that he'd had a bad past when it came to relationships and I always felt that he blamed me. And I was at a point where I was getting that low with trying to cope with the exhaustion of sometimes his behaviour that I started to doubt myself and I started thinking, well, maybe it is me.... Then they offered it [DVDS] to me and I got that clarity. As I said, it changed a lot with my way of thinking. So that was a real – yeah, confirmation for me that it's not – I'm not to blame here. And I guess too when you see a person's repeat behaviour and it's shown there right there for you to see it actually – it's more of a reality check. Sometimes you can tend to be in denial.

I'm like, okay. Well, at least I know that there is stuff documented – some people have documented stuff.

For some applicants, the disclosure of their partner/ex-partner's history was the main factor in their deciding to end the relationship or resolving not to go back to their partner.

It just gave me the confidence to know or stop me from being weak and going back to him I guess.

I think because my mind was already made up, it sort of just helped me to stay on track with what I wanted in the future.

For others, going through the disclosure process resulted in the applicant putting in place safety mechanisms, particularly regarding any children in the relationship and visitation protocols with their ex-partner.

It's given me the resolve to make the decisions that I had to make and know that I'm making the right ones; do you know what I mean? I felt before I went through that I just felt I was flicking around trying to find the right thing to do... It helped me to come to the point where I went nuh, this is the line I'm drawing. You can either seek those supervised visits or take it through the court.

4.4.2. Access to services and supports

Most of the applicants interviewed had been receiving support regarding their situation prior to applying to the Scheme. However, several applicants received support or services as a result of going through the disclosure process.

Applicants particularly appreciated the follow-up call from the support service after the disclosure. They felt that this call helped them to feel supported and able to ask for assistance if they needed it.

The follow up one or two weeks later was good too, because often you can say no I don't want any help but then rethink it. So that was good too.

I knew that she was there. I could ring her any time as well if I was having a meltdown.

For some applicants, the support service was able to provide additional services directly, while for others, their support worker provided referrals to other services or supports. The support and services mentioned included:

- counselling
- reassurance regarding existing safety arrangements or court orders
- putting in place safety arrangements such as CCTV
- liaising with Centrelink and other support services
- referral to family lawyers

- referral to support groups
- providing a diary to document abuse
- providing food hampers
- access to health care, for both the applicant and their children
- initiating ADVO proceedings
- court support.

Applicants interviewed were typically very grateful for the support received and of the view that it helped them at a time when they were feeling uneasy, vulnerable, or having to make a major decision in their life and move forward. Again, this in part reflects the needs people who were using the DVDS, some of whom were in the stages of separating or leaving a relationship and needing to do that safely.

Applicants who did not receive any information in the disclosure were also appreciative of the support they received. This reflects the program data that identified that support was provided at similar rates regardless of whether there had been a disclosure.

4.4.3. Would applicants recommend the DVDS?

All applicants interviewed indicated that they would recommend the DVDS to others: some had already recommended it to friends.

My thing would be to get it out there to let women know – I mean, even on my Facebook I've shared a post before about the Disclosure Scheme several times. Just to let people know that this Scheme does exist and that if you do have any concerns, or you are with a partner and you have doubts and things like that.

Applicants interviewed were asked to identify why they would recommend the DVDS and if there was any particular group that they believe it would be useful for. The main areas that applicants believed the Scheme would be useful for are included in Table 8 overleaf.

Some respondents felt that the DVDS has limited usefulness as it cannot disclose information about offences that have occurred in other jurisdictions.

I didn't love the fact that I couldn't find anything else out about any other state because that's my nagging question, but I do understand why.

I think with a Scheme like this, it needs to be Australia-wide because they said to me if we find anything we might be able to liaise with the Queensland police ... But that didn't work out because [Queensland] wasn't covered by this scheme.

Table 8 – Reasons applicants would recommend the DVDS

Reason	Quote
Early on in a relationship, before the relationship is abusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>One of the things that I think is disappointing is that you only find out about the Disclosure Scheme after you've been a victim of crime.</i> ▪ <i>Rather than finding out when it's too late. If there's an early warning system, you know we have early warning systems for tsunamis, I would say this, metaphorically is very similar. All of a sudden you are overwhelmed, and engulfed and entrapped and you swim as hard as you can but you're not getting out. If we can put something in place for other people where they don't have to be that far in before they're aware that I am going to die here. If it saves one life, then isn't it worth it?</i>
To confirm that the abuse is part of an ongoing pattern of behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Just because you have that instinct that something is going to happen or things are escalating, if you know they've taken it further, they've violent before, it can be the catalyst for you to go right that's it, I'm not sticking around to see that, before it even happens. Or even if it's happening to you and you're thinking that you know maybe things will change. That was the kind of things I thought. He's just not being himself. He's having a hard time at the moment. Well, no. If he's done it in the past it's just something he does, it can help you come to the realisation of that's the way he behaves. That's his normal behaviour.</i>
To confidentially and safely access information that may help in making decisions about the relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>If you suspect that a partner is abusive you can go to the police and you can fill out some forms and have that particular person investigated, quietly without anyone knowing. You can just reassure yourself and then if there's evidence the police will alert the person who is being abused of the background to that person. So you can provide some safety and some information that can get you out of a situation before any damage – well probably there's damage already – but before things get any worse.</i> ▪ <i>It's completely confidential. It's very quick and easy but the service will play by your rules... that it's at least worth going and you can hear from a statutory body that what's going on with you perhaps you should be cautious about it or perhaps you shouldn't accept that sort of behaviour or threat from a partner. That in the end, whether you like what's been said or you don't, it's up to you what you do with that information. So again, you've got the power, the control over what you do with it.</i>
For family members who suspect that their loved one is in an abusive relationship, or want to help their loved one leave an abusive relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>I'm sure it will be used more widely but particularly by relatives who can see what is happening to their loved ones by nutcases. I think it's a great Scheme and I really, really recommend it. And even if you can't get all the information that you want at the time, there's still support there that can be given to you. So I think from both points of view, the information and the support, it's really, really valuable.</i>

5. DVDS IMPLEMENTATION

5.1. STRENGTHS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION

Many aspects of the implementation of the DVDS have gone reasonably well since the establishment of the pilot in April 2016. The most positive aspects of the implementation include the following:

The Operational Guidelines for the DVDS have in most cases provided clear guidance to police and support services on eligibility, thresholds, application processes and disclosures.

There has been clarity regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of the LACs and the support services in regard to the DVDS and few, if any issues of overlap, duplication, conflict or misunderstanding were identified.

A training program on the DVDS was rolled out to police officers in all four LACs at the commencement of the pilot. Although there have been limitations on the impact of this training – the fact it was undertaken and attended by most officers in the participating LACs signalled the level of importance being attached to the initiative by the government.

Recruitment into the support service positions occurred fairly quickly and smoothly. In most cases, this involved internal recruitment as, in all cases, the support services were located within established services providing a range of domestic violence and related programs e.g. Safer Pathways, Domestic Violence Intervention Service, WDVCS, Staying Home Leaving Violence etc.

Strong working relationships and partnerships were quickly established between LACs (in particular DVLOs) and the support services in all four pilot sites in relation to administering the DVDS.

An effective partnership approach to managing the sometimes, challenging disclosure/non-disclosure discussion with applicants has been developed. Both police and support services are of the view these have been handled sensitively and skilfully in most cases. DVLOs have taken on the key role of running the disclosure/non-disclosure meeting and this is considered by all to be appropriate.

All support services have made considerable efforts to promote, inform and continually educate the local service networks, community and, in some cases, the police about the DVDS. Considerable evidence was provided of a range of activities and strategies including attending local service networks (domestic violence and other community services), and promoting the Scheme through schools, clubs, local newspapers and radio. Although, this effort did not always convert to an increase in applications – it has been an important first step in raising awareness of the Scheme and contributing to learnings about what works and what doesn't work in reaching an early intervention audience.

Staff retention both amongst DVLOs and the Support Services has been reasonably stable which has supported the development of 'corporate knowledge' and key learnings about the effective operation of the Scheme.

Applicants interviewed have been generally satisfied with the process of applying to the DVDS, receiving their disclosure/non-disclosure and the support provided.

The DVDS has operated within the designated time guidelines, in most cases. Only two or three cases were identified the disclosure/meeting did not take place within two weeks of the application being made. Where required (i.e. the applicant has been assessed as being at high risk), the disclosure meeting has taken place within one or two days.

There have been no reported breaches of the Operational Guidelines by police or by support services.

No applicants have had any action taken against them in relation to allegedly misusing the information they have been provided with through the DVDS.

5.2. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The DVDS pilot has not been without a number of implementation challenges.

The knowledge, awareness and/or confidence of General Duties Officers in receiving and processing DVDS applications was often lacking

Police, support services and applicants all reported concerns and/or frustration about General Duties Officers often not being aware of the DVDS when applicants have gone to the police station to enquire about the Scheme, request an application form or make an application. Typically, the General Duties Officer calls the DVLO for advice or assistance. However, DVLOs work Monday to Friday only from 9am to 5pm. There were reports from services and applicants of some applicants being asked to come back to the police station at another time (e.g. when a DVLO would be there). In one case, a woman attended three different police stations before she was able to lodge her DVDS application. An unknown number of potential applicants may have been deterred from making an application due to such experiences. According to police, the main reasons for police officers' lack of knowledge of the Scheme are:

- high levels of staff turnover within the LAC
- front desk staff often being quite junior and inexperienced General Duties Officers
- police officers not having attended the DVDS training (although DVLOs report making continuous efforts to inform and educate officers about the Scheme, including in the orientation of new recruits).

Moreover, the majority of police officers have no practical experience of the DVDS, due to the low numbers of applications to date. Consequently, they have no opportunity to become familiar with the Scheme, and/or practice what they learned at the training a year or more previously. DVLOs have often played a key role in assisting people with making an application at the police station. While this has been manageable up until now due to limited number of applications, this may become more problematic if the numbers of applications significantly increase over time.

All support services have experienced difficulties in increasing the number of applications over time as the pilot has become more established

The amount of effort expended on promoting and marketing the DVDS locally has not translated into a growth in the number of applications, despite promotional material having been distributed widely throughout the community (e.g. community events, police stations, shopping centres, GP surgeries, community service noticeboards, early childhood centres, community health centres, hairdressers etc). As noted previously, possible explanations for this include the delay in receiving revised and translated promotional material from the Department; the wording of the pamphlets and posters not being fit for purpose; the fact translated versions of the promotional material only became available in the second year of the pilot; a limited focus (at least initially) on promoting the DVDS to the broader community or to third party applicants with the primary focus on the service sector; a lack of experience/skill in NGOs conducting effective social marketing campaigns to 'nudge' people into taking actions; constraints on broader marketing and promotion.

There are differing views or understandings about whose responsibility it is to 'drive' DVDS applications

Although this is not the case in all pilot LACs, some support services expressed frustration or disappointment that police did not do more to encourage people to make an application to the DVDS. From the police perspective, however, most do not see this as their role (the support service having the responsibility and the funding to execute it); they do not have time to promote or drive the Scheme; and/or it is not a priority for them given the range of other, arguably more urgent, duties they have to perform in attending domestic violence incidents, laying charges and keeping women and children safe. Their role in relation to the DVDS is seen as primarily administrative. It is also arguable whether people in contact with the police are the core target group for the DVDS, with its strong focus on prevention and early intervention. Nevertheless, in at least one LAC, the police took a strong position on supporting the DVDS through identifying potential applicants and informing them about the Scheme. They saw this as a legitimate and important activity.

The program data collection and reporting requirements were over-ambitious and time-consuming

While the desire to collect data was admirable, the volume of reporting was out of balance with the program (e.g. almost 90 data fields for the DVDS for what was commonly a two-week period of contact with the applicant). The lack of a data dictionary was also problematic with data fields not clearly defined, and therefore open to varying interpretations. Moreover, the data reporting system was 'clunky' and time-consuming. The Department has worked to clarify and streamline the data collection system and there have been improvements. However, should the DVDS be rolled out to new sites, more work would be required to further improve the quality and content of the data collected, as well as the level of financial reporting.

The lack of a formal mechanism to share ideas and learnings was seen as a gap by police and support services

In response, Women NSW arranged a joint workshop in July 2017 to discuss operational and other issues, including those identified in the Interim Evaluation Report. The workshop aimed to develop closer and more regular communication and networking between pilots, and between pilots and program management and supported implementation and learnings development.

5.3. THE DVDS APPLICATION PROCESS

Most applicants reported that the application process was relatively straightforward and that the disclosure meeting was held soon after the application was lodged. One applicant, however, said she had had to wait for over three months for a disclosure meeting to be set, and then it was only after the applicant had contacted a senior officer who had subsequently investigated the delay. At the time of the interview, the applicant had not received an explanation for the delay in the processing of her application.

Table 9 – Other issues raised by applicants regarding the application process

Issue	Quote
A lack of front-line police knowledge regarding the Scheme. Some applicants reported that the officer at the front desk of the police station was not aware of the Scheme when they came to lodge their application	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>So there was a guy there and he didn't know what – I think he was quite a new policeman, so he didn't know what to do with it. So he had to call the domestic violence people upstairs and they just told him what to do, but it did take quite a while.</i>
Having to fill in a hard copy form. Some applicants identified that it may be easier and less intimidating to have be able to fill in the online and, if required sign any documentation when they attended the police station for the disclosure. Others identified that printing the form may be a barrier to people being able to make an application as not everyone has access to a printer, and even if they do, they may have to provide a reason for printing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>It would be good if you could just do it online... the online thing might be a bit better because it's not so daunting.</i>▪ <i>A lot of people don't have access to printing and also if they do have access to it they need to let someone know why they need access to it.</i>
The time lag between the application and the disclosure. While most applicants were satisfied with the time taken to set up a disclosure meeting, some applicants who were hoping the disclosure would assist them with decision making found the time lag to be frustrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>The only thing I didn't like was the gap between because I had to wait to get the information. Yeah, it seemed like an eternity because I just wanted it then and there, you know.</i>

Issue	Quote
Confusion around the LAC areas covered by the pilot. Two applicants interviewed had a lack of clarity over their ability to make an application due to the Scheme only being available in four LACs. This was particularly the case for one applicant who was homeless and was initially told that they were not eligible to make an application.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>All I was told by the two ladies in the DV unit that I wasn't in the area for it... Even though I was technically homeless but I was staying in a friend's house in [suburb] ... But my understanding now is [suburb] – which is where my address on my driver's licence was at that time when I was living with him – is covered.</i> ▪ <i>Because there were four police command areas that were being piloted ... and I didn't know how they would work because I know that and then I didn't know how, I thought I'm in one ... and ... the abusive fellow is in [another pilot] area.</i>
Discomfort at having to go to the police station to make an application. Most of the applicants were comfortable with having to go to the police station to make the application and receive the disclosure. However, one applicant mentioned that they did have some concerns that someone may question why they were attending the police station.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>At the police station, yeah I guess sometimes I think I worry what people would think I was doing there, if anyone had found out what are you doing at the police station, what are you doing?</i>

5.4. THE DISCLOSURE MEETING

The meeting at which the disclosure or non-disclosure is made to the applicant is a critical element of the DVDS. The disclosure/non-disclosure is always made orally and in person. It typically takes 20 to 40 minutes depending on what is disclosed. The primary person has to sign a form that they will keep the information provided confidential; not share the information they receive with family, community or social networks and; that the information is only to be used to assist them make a decision with regard to their relationship, undertake safety planning and access support services.

It should be noted police have the ability to disclose information outside of the DVDS. They can disclose information, including criminal history, to an individual or an agency, if the disclosure would assist with the protection of persons from injury or death, or prevent a crime (Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 s27 (1) and Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 s17).

Almost all the police and support services report they are pleased with the way the DVDS disclosures have been handled. They are widely seen as having been sensitively and skilfully managed. All agree that it is critical that DVLOs (and Domestic Violence Supervisors) conduct the disclosures, as considerable knowledge and experience in domestic violence is required to do them well and safely. The dual approach is seen to work well – with the DVLO making the formal disclosure/non-disclosure and the support person providing personal and other support to the applicant, and making sure they have understood everything that they have been told in the disclosure meeting.

However, a key finding of the evaluation is that in cases where there are criminal offences but they do not meet the DVDS threshold, many (if not most) DVLOs are using varying strategies to let applicants know, while there is nothing that can be disclosed under the DVDS, they may be at risk. The rationale for this is that DVLOs do not want the applicant leaving the meeting believing they are safe, when the police think they may be at some risk. Although DVLOs do not provide specific details or information, they use certain phrases, or make certain statements, to indicate to the applicant, for example, that just because there is no offence to disclose, this does not mean that the POI has not got a criminal record or committed other violent offences. The following statement explains this further.

The only written documentation is what we're writing in that meeting so I think the police feel very strongly about that woman's safety. So they will say in a roundabout way to let her know that just because I'm not telling you about a conviction, I'm telling you this person may not be safe. They're allowed to say that and some of the things that they might be insinuating is really helpful to those women. You can see them nodding and going right. They raise their eyebrows and say there are things here that I cannot divulge to you. For example, I couldn't tell you if A, B, C has happened. By telling them or not telling them. It's really crucial.

It should be noted that only disclosures which meet the DVDS threshold are classed as a 'disclosure' under the DVDS.

The DVDS process has apparently worked well for those who have applied to the Scheme to date. No major issues were raised about applicants' willingness to attend the police station. The official setting is regarded by many as appropriate, and in some cases, reassuring for the applicant. Nevertheless, in one or two cases, the applicant did not attend the meeting. Follow-up calls were made to engage with them, but to no avail. It is not known why they did not see the DVDS process through to its conclusion.

However, this finding is likely to reflect those who have applied to the DVDS in the pilot phase. They have been willing to go into a police station to lodge an application in person. It is therefore likely they would find it less daunting to attend the police station for the disclosure meeting. As the current application process (attending a police station in person) is perceived as a major barrier to accessing the DVDS, further consideration needs to be given to holding the disclosure meeting in a safe place other than the police station. This has already occurred in at least one of the LACs (in an Aboriginal community organisation) and apparently worked to the satisfaction of all parties. The feasibility of this approach would need to be further investigated, as it would potentially have implications for the efficiency of the Scheme and for DVLOs whose time and resources are already stretched.

For third party applicants, the disclosure can only be made to the 'primary person' on whose behalf the application can be made, unless there are exceptional circumstances (for example, the primary person does not want to be involved in DVDS). This is potentially a sensitive and difficult part of the DVDS to implement. Due to the small number of third party applicants, and the small number of those who agreed to, or could be, contacted for an interview – there is insufficient evidence at this time to assess how this aspect of the DVDS has been implemented and what the outcomes have been. We do know from feedback from stakeholders, case notes and one or two primary persons directly that they have been very upset with the third party for making the application. They see the third party as interfering, prejudiced against their partners and/or using the scheme as a ploy to see their grandchildren. They have therefore generally not been open to engaging with the DVDS. More evidence will be needed in any subsequent roll out of the DVDS to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the third party element of the DVDS model.

Several applicants commented that they appreciated the way that the police officer handled the disclosure meeting. They felt that the officers were aware of the complexity of abusive relationships and were clear in explaining the limitations of the Scheme.

Extremely comfortable. It was very respectful. It was friendly. It was light, light-hearted but as well extremely informative and I felt like they let me know lots of options, yeah.

However, while some applicants appreciated the professionalism of the police, several commented that the way that they handled the meeting had made them feel a bit rushed and that the police were detached.

Just explained it a bit more better. What I can ask and what they, what I can't ask I guess. And maybe just tell me, like, when it's finished, give me a minute to process and ask questions if I needed to, if I was allowed to.

Obviously I think they must deal with a lot of it so to them it was a little bit – not who cares – but ... because they're so used to it, because it's their job and they see a lot of it, whereas for me, it's very foreign.

A couple of the applicants reported the way the police communicated their partner's history was confusing and that they would have appreciated more information or clarity to help them understand what was actually being disclosed.

The only thing I remember the police officer saying to me was that just bear in mind that there's different degrees of breaches of ADVO, and at the time I didn't have any idea what she meant. That just drew a blank for me. I had no idea.

The limitations in what police are able to disclose through the Scheme was clear to most of the applicants. Many recalled being specifically informed of the limitations of what could be disclosed. In several cases these limitations were used by police to suggest that, while there was nothing to disclose, that did not mean that the applicant should not be concerned.

He said just because there's nothing that they can tell me doesn't mean that nothing has happened. They also said it's usually intuition and the things that I had said about my partner were a little bit of a concern as standalone things. They just warned me just because no charges have been laid doesn't mean that nothing has gone down in the past as well.

There was nothing we have to tell you but that doesn't mean there's nothing at all. That just means nothing relevant in the specific box of things that we can look at.

Most of the applicants interviewed were very appreciative of the support that the support worker was able to provide during the disclosure. Even if the applicant felt initially that they did not need support during the disclosure meeting, they appreciated the support worker attending and particularly the conversations after the meeting. Applicants particularly appreciated their support worker's understanding of the disclosure process and being able to interpret what was being disclosed and ask additional questions, if needed.

I actually didn't think I would need someone and I was like –when she was there I was like, oh, actually, I'll be alright, but then actually once she was there and we could talk about it afterwards it was actually really helpful.

She was asking questions for me – stuff that I wasn't – wouldn't have thought to ask.... Because she knew questions to ask that I wouldn't have thought of, and just having someone to talk to about it that kind of understood.

She was asking the police officer questions that I wouldn't. I was just sitting there crying and she was doing all the talking for me. So she'd ask questions and she was documenting, like, writing stuff down.

The emotional support and practical advice and reassurance provided by the support workers during the disclosure meeting was also highly valued by applicants.

I was just so pleased to have the support [of the worker] there.... she was there to support me and to talk through the issues of emotional abuse and to see, really, it was just a support role

And she was just like, so you know, you've got a really good ADVO, you've moved house, you've got quite a lot of good, positive stuff, you're going to be fine....so it was more re-confirming and just having someone there to just remind you.

Some applicants said the existing relationship between the support worker and the police made the meeting with the officer more comfortable.

I guess my caseworker had had previous contact with her [the DVLO] because they got on really well and they made me feel really comfortable.

If I didn't ask the questions of the officer, she [the support worker] would just anticipate that maybe you need to explain that more. Or she would explain to me, do you know what I mean? She probably deals with that officer a fair bit because it was probably her local one. So yeah, it was either her prompting the officer to maybe explain more on a point or her explaining, I felt like it worked well together.

5.4.1. Relevant offences

A threshold for the disclosure of information was set for the purpose of the pilot. The threshold of the disclosure of information is a *conviction for a relevant offence*.

Relevant offences include offences defined as personal violence offences in Section 4 of the Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007. These are 'domestic violence offences' for the purpose of the Act when they are committed in particular relationships. While Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVO) cannot be disclosed, breaches of an ADVO are included as a domestic violence offence. Certain personal violence offences set out in the Act are also included as relevant offences regardless of who they were committed against, specifically sexual offences, child abuse offences, and murder.

The threshold test was agreed by government stakeholders following consideration of the approach adopted in the UK model, feedback from public consultations, and the various challenges, benefits and risk – weighing up the risk to the primary person with the subject's (POI) right to privacy. The model that was introduced for the pilot was designed to be '*simple and accessible*' and '*delivered with minimal impact on agency resources*' (NSW Government undated p.20). In making a decision about the types of offences or convictions able to be disclosed under the DVDS pilot (i.e. 'relevant offences'), the following factors were taken into account:

The NSW Police Force already had the power to provide information about previous convictions to a primary person in appropriate circumstances (excluding 'spent' convictions)

The DVDS pilot adopted a limited threshold that does not involve NSW Police Force considering whether the risk to the person outweighs the right to privacy of the subject (POI). Therefore, it was not considered appropriate to include all offences of violence more generally 'as this could result in the disclosure of a very broad range of offences where there is not risk to the primary person' (NSW Government undated). It would be more complex, more difficult, potentially more bureaucratic and resource-intensive.

Under the NSW Criminal Records Act 1991, a person is not required to disclose a spent conviction and it is unlawful to disclose information concerning spent convictions (except where an exclusion applies). A spent conviction is one where the person's sentence is six month's imprisonment or less and they have not been convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment for 10 consecutive years (if they are an adult) or not been convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment or subject to a control order for three consecutive year (if they are a child). Exclusions include employment in certain occupations or holding a civic office. The scheme is based on the need to not disadvantage people for past offences after lengthy periods of good behaviour and in line with research that says the risk of re-offending after 10 years is very low.

Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs) were excluded from the DVDS because they are civil orders, with a lower threshold than that set for criminal convictions and they 'do not evidence any criminal conduct in the past, but are in place to regulate future conduct and prevent domestic violence from occurring in the future' (NSW Government undated p.23). They can be made by mutual consent and without admission on the part of the defendant to minimise trauma for people in need of protection and enable the matter to be dealt with speedily. There were concerns that, including ADVOs in the DVDS might result in a reduction in the number of people consenting to ADVOs and an increase in the number of defended hearings, impacting negatively on people in need of protection.

Section 10 of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 enables a court, upon a plea or finding of guilt to order the dismissal of charges without recording a conviction. Section 10s were excluded from the threshold, as 'the offence meets the criteria set in that Section' – including the trivial nature of the offence and extenuating circumstances in which the offence was committed.

Juvenile convictions were excluded from the threshold mainly because much juvenile offending is considered 'acting out' behaviour that is not indicative of pattern of violence against intimate partners and there is a long-standing legal principle that prevents disclosure of any criminal offence by a child – as most do not go on to offend when they become adults.

Interstate convictions were excluded from the pilot principally on the grounds of the time and resources it would take to obtain interstate criminal histories, potentially the quality of the records and administrative complexity given the different legislation and types of offences across jurisdictions making it difficult to identify 'relevant offences.'

5.4.2. Views on the threshold

In consultations for the evaluation, opinions were sought on the appropriateness of the threshold for disclosure. There was a fair degree of consensus across the four pilot LACS, from both the support services and police regarding a clear preference for the disclosure threshold to be expanded to cover the following matters:

- ADVOs
- convictions for more violent crimes
- interstate convictions.

Some stakeholders argued that all ADVOs should be able to be disclosed. More commonly stakeholders thought **there was a strong argument for disclosing where there was a pattern of ADVOs either in relation to a previous partner or different partners over time**. The main rationale provided for this was that it is widely acknowledged that domestic violence is under-reported, and that only a fraction of incidents result in a charge, let alone a conviction: *“Convictions are very, very low because charges can be withdrawn, the women can be so scared”*. A pattern of ADVOs over time or across different relationships in the past is a warning sign that a person in a current relationship with the POI is potentially at risk.

The new National Domestic Violence Order Scheme (NDVOS) that came into effect in November 2017 presents an excellent opportunity in many stakeholders’ minds to enhance the effectiveness of the DVDS further. New laws have been passed to enable family violence restraining orders to be enforced across Australia. NDVOS aims to strengthen the protection of victims of family violence by eliminating barriers to the enforcement of restraining orders. A person protected by a nationally recognised order can move between states and territories without losing the protection of the order. The NDVOS also aims to make it easier for police to prosecute breaches where the victim and perpetrator are located in different states. The new scheme will enable the NSW Police Force to access the POI’s ADVO history across the country, and not only in NSW as before. Although our understanding is this Scheme is not retrospective, over time it will considerably expand the volume and value of information that can be disclosed on ADVO histories.

Just today we had someone in court and he's had 5 or 6 ADVOs against him with two different women, but he's never been convicted. That was over a long period of time – 15 years or something like that ... I think sometimes that information should be disclosed.

DVLO

I'd like to be able to tell them about ADVOs because someone could have 10 ADVOs and never been charged and we can't tell them anything about it.

DVLO

A lot of people [applicants] don't even want to know about the charges ... they often ask about the ADVOs ... I think disclosing ADVOs history would have a huge impact on people's decisions.

DVLO

This ADVO – this piece of paper means you can't come in contact with her. You can't do X or Y. You've agreed and we have instances where there might be 3 or 4 of these with different women. The fact you can't disclose this – seems pointless to me. So it's only where he's got to the point where he becomes very, very violent or is convicted – it's only then you can make a disclosure. But you might have 4 or 5 ADVOs, that's a pretty good indicator he's not a nice guy.

WDVCAS

It's a really tough one ... one of the huge difficulties is that you can't disclose ADVOs and I understand the reasons why. It's not a criminal offence. But you can have perpetrators who've had six previous ADVOs but no convictions. There's a story there that can't be told.

WDVCAS

Even if police-initiated ADVOs were included, that would be beneficial: there has to be some evidence for that ADVO to have been made. At the end of the day, it's not the victim who's making the application, or making the decisions to have that ADVOs signed off. The police have to have quite a lot of evidence to put that application to the Magistrate and for the Magistrate to sign it off.

Support Service

If the police are taking out an ADVO on behalf of a woman, that should be absolutely disclosed.

DVLO

There has to be a pattern. If there's only one or two [DV charges or ADVOs] absolutely not. But let police have the discretion. We know there's a pattern here and that he's no good. She should have the right to know that – not going into all of the details – but let her know there is a pattern.

Domestic Violence Coordinator

There was also support for including in 'relevant offences' all prior convictions for violent offences (or at least some of the more serious ones) – regardless of the relationship with the victim (i.e. expanding beyond sexual assault, murder and child abuse). The main rationale for this is that any such conviction is evidence the POI has been violent in the past and that those who have concerns about their relationship should be given access to this information, or given access in circumstances where it is considered warranted (i.e. police be given discretion to disclose this information in certain specified circumstances).

An assault is an assault as far as I am concerned. If you grab people around their throat – whether it's your wife or the next door neighbour, it's the same violent action.

DVLO

I've had a couple of applicants where we've known serious assaults have occurred in a non-domestic violence situation. If it's serious enough that it could put someone at risk in a domestic relationship, I think those sorts of things should be able to be disclosed.

Support Service

I think any sort of violence should be disclosed ... where there's been an assault, weapons involved ... or if you have one domestic violence conviction and three other violent offences ... I think that information is really good to know – that they've been done for dealing drugs. That the environment is not safe or healthy. That they're not people for you to be having children around.

Support Service

In recognition of the sensitivity or complexity of the disclosure, some argued for police to have discretion to disclose such information in certain circumstances (e.g. where weapons have been involved, where in addition to a one domestic violence conviction, they have other violent convictions) where there is a pattern of violent offending, police could disclose this and justify the reasons why they are exercising their discretion.

Notwithstanding that obtaining access to a POI's criminal record in other jurisdictions can be time-consuming, complex and resource-intensive **there was considerable support for including interstate convictions in the threshold**. The main reason for this is that all four pilots said they are dealing with applicants and POIs who have lived interstate for a period of time and have a known history of offending in some cases. Pragmatic considerations concerning the difficulty in accessing information from other jurisdictions should not take precedence over people's safety.

We had a guy come from [interstate] who had been in and out of gaol for domestic violence. The last time he went to gaol was because he put his girlfriend in the boot of her car and set the car alight. Lucky somebody got her out ... but we wouldn't know about or be able to disclose that information [under the current system].

Support Service

5.5. THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN THE DVDS AND THE CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

It is unclear what expectations there were in relation to the intersection between the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service. What has become increasingly apparent over time, however, is that the two initiatives are quite discrete and separate. There is limited overlap between DVDS applicants and Crisis Assistance Service clients. There can be confusion in the client's mind of the distinction between the two Schemes as they are provided by the same community organisation and both provide referral to other organisations. Furthermore, the (small) overlap between the two groups in the pilot may partly be a function of the support services drawing extensively on their client base to encourage people to make a DVDS application. We have seen from applicants' feedback that the DVDS had been useful in these circumstances.

Nevertheless, there were some cases where people both used the Crisis Assistance Service and the DVDS, most commonly the DVDS application being made after crisis support has been provided. The general consensus is that a crisis situation is not the most appropriate time to be engaging with people in relation to the DVDS. People involved in a crisis domestic violence incident have more pressing needs than considering the potential benefit of finding out about their partner/ex-partner's criminal history.

It's not obviously at the forefront of their mind because when you're in crisis it's about their immediate housing, their immediate safety, their children, their emotional state. They're usually very, very upset. It's very distressing – it [the DVDS] is not something you have a conversation about.

Support Service

Most of the Crisis Assistance Service clients know [the perpetrator] has a history anyway. She's in crisis. She cares about housing, food and those things before she cares about his history. But I think you can come back to it.

Support Service

Some Crisis Assistance Service workers did subsequently suggest a DVDS application to some clients, but only after the client was feeling calm, out of danger: she's *'got to feel safe'*. It is considered potentially useful in situations where she or he has some breathing space (e.g. there is an ADVO in place, or the perpetrator is incarcerated following a domestic violence incident) or if they are thinking of going back to the relationship.

5.6. COST OF OPERATING THE DVDS

NGOs were contracted by Women NSW to operate both the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service for two years. It was left to the NGOs to determine how the funds were allocated across the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service and they were not required to report separately on the expenditure across the two schemes.

To assist in calculating the cost of each DVDS application, for the purpose of the evaluation, Women NSW requested each NGO to provide a breakdown of expenditure across the two pilot initiatives for one financial

year: from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. The cost per DVDS application was calculated with reference to that 12 month period only, and not for the duration of the pilot.

In 2016/17, the cost of operating the DVDS was \$253,362 resulting in a per application cost of \$3,959.

There are a number of caveats that need to be made regarding the above calculation and considerable caution is required in considering the interpretation of the costs data:

- The methodology is based only on the funding allocated to the four support services to operate the Scheme in each pilot area. It does not include funding for program administration by Women NSW. Nor does it include the cost to the NSW Police Force of administering the Scheme (no funding was made available to police to operate the Scheme, this task being undertaken within existing resources).
- The methodology to separate out the cost of operating the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Services was not standardised across the NGOs operating the pilot schemes. Each NGO was requested by Women NSW to provide an estimate of the expenditure retrospectively. It is possible that different methodologies were used, and different assumptions made, in calculating the relative cost of the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service.
- The actual cost per DVDS application varied across the four pilot areas. Given that each pilot area was given the exact same level of funding to operate the two schemes (\$250,000 per year), and that some areas have received four times the number of DVDS applications than others, the variation in cost is likely to be considerable. (The cost per pilot has not been included in the report as financial information was provided by NGOs on a confidential basis.)

Notwithstanding these caveats and inconsistencies – it is apparent that, at the current levels of utilisation, the cost per DVDS application is substantial.

6. DVDS PILOT: KEY FINDINGS AND OPTIONS

6.1. KEY FINDINGS

There is in principle support for the DVDS in the service community, but this has not translated into significant demand for the Scheme to date

No specific targets or expectations were set at the commencement of the DVDS. It is therefore not possible to say whether DVDS utilisation to date is in line with what was anticipated. The demand for the Scheme has been limited thus far and there is little sign of any increase in demand over time as the DVDS has become more established.

People who have utilised the DVDS to date do not meet the anticipated target group

The DVDS was envisioned as an early intervention initiative. However, only a minority of applicants in the pilot phase are in the early stages of a relationship. Most have been in a longer relationship with the POI (one in four applicant for more than five years); many have been or are still living with their partner; and some have children with the POI. The DVDS pilot has thus failed to effectively reach the target group. However, an unintended consequence of the pilot is that the DVDS has been found to have been useful to a broader range of people than those in the early stages of their relationship, but who are potentially at risk.

Three distinct groups of DVDS applicants have emerged from the pilot

Category	Main reason for applying to the DVDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">People at an early stage in an intimate relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Concern or anxieties about potential or actual abuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none">People who have been in a relationship with the POI for some time, and who are contemplating leaving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A desire to obtain information that would help them make a decision about whether or not to end the relationship with the POI
<ul style="list-style-type: none">People who have been in a relationship with the POI for some time, but who are no longer living with them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A desire to obtain information that would 'confirm' the decision they had made to leave the relationship or to take legal action (e.g. an ADVO) against the POI.

It can reasonably be argued that it is a positive outcome that the DVDS has wider application than was originally anticipated. There is emerging evidence that people at risk are using the information disclosed (or not disclosed) to make or consolidate relationship decisions, or legal or other actions already taken. It is making a difference in their lives. Support services, the police and applicants are largely in agreement about this. This is an important finding of the evaluation – however, more research is needed to test this further.

The operation of the DVDS has worked well – with strong partnerships approach being developed between the DVLOs in each LAC and the support services

There has been good communication and cooperation between the two agencies and the process seems to have run smoothly in most cases. This has been enhanced by a strong commitment to the success of the Scheme by both police (in particular the DVLOs) and the support services as well as a continuity in staffing. Applications have been processed in time (with a couple of exceptions) and police and support services are generally happy with the way the disclosure meetings have been run. Both agree it is critical to the success of the Scheme that this dual approach is adopted, and that both parties must have knowledge, experience and understanding of domestic violence to manage the often sometimes difficult and sensitive conversations with applicants during disclosures.

Although the number of DVDS applications is modest, there are early indications that the DVDS is proving of value to individual applicants

Where relevant offences have been disclosed, there is emerging evidence from a small sample of applicants and also from support service case notes that this information is being used in some cases to support the applicant to make decisions about their relationship and/or to take actions to make them and their children safe. In most cases, this involves a decision to end or leave a relationship or a deepening of their resolve about a decision or course of action they have already made to leave the relationship or take legal action against their partner/ex-partner. People accessing the DVDS are also being linked into a range of community supports they might not have otherwise accessed. Applying to the DVDS has enabled applicants to be linked into personal, family or other supports as needed at the time. Not all applicants need or want support, but those who have accessed the Scheme to date have appreciated the support received. However, the evidence for these promising signs is based on a small sample of applicants and more evidence is needed to confirm these preliminary findings drawing on a larger sample. The importance of hearing directly from applicants cannot be underestimated, as only they can comment on the extent to which the DVDS has supported them to make decisions about their relationship or take actions to increase their safety.

Applicants who have accessed the DVDS can benefit, whether or not there has been an offence to disclose

Applicants with no disclosure have been linked into supports at the same rate as other applicants, and have found the process to be valuable. Even if no offence is disclosed, applicants may be experiencing relationship or parenting difficulties, health or mental health issues, or be in need of personal or other support. They therefore can be linked into appropriate supports. Applications involving disclosures (and where the police have not given 'hints' about non-relevant offences) can assist people to 'move on' and provides some relief from anxiety or worry. Whether this is a false sense of security, however, is unknown.

Many DVDS applicants are not in the early stages of their relationship with the POI

There are a range of potential reasons for this. In the first year of the pilot, support services focussed their efforts on promoting the Scheme within service networks, rather than in the broader community. This resulted in many applicants being referred to the DVDS through family support and other services. Although most services have shifted the focus to broader communication strategies (e.g. local newspapers, posters) it remains to be seen how effective these strategies will be in the medium to longer term.

It seems the complexity and difficulty in 'marketing' the DVDS to members of the broader community, who do not have contact with service networks, was underestimated. More time, support, resources and skills are required to do this effectively. NGOs are not experts in social marketing, which is necessary for an early intervention strategy of this kind. Neither was their task helped by the constraints upon the extent of the publicity that could be undertaken given the pilots were limited to four LACs. All stakeholders argue that a new concept like the DVDS takes times to gain traction in the community. They think that as more concrete examples of the impact of the Scheme become available, the momentum for the Scheme will grow through 'word of mouth' and other channels. Nevertheless, a comprehensive, strategic and focused approach to targeting people in the early stage of their relationship would be required in any future roll-out of the DVDS. Further consideration would also need to be given to specific strategies targeted at third party applicants.

The concept of 'early intervention' needs to be clarified

There is a view amongst some stakeholders that as an 'early intervention' Scheme, the DVDS should focus on people in the community who have not experienced domestic violence before. However, the Scheme has been found to be useful to people who have had a history of violent and abusive relationships, and who do not want to find themselves in that situation again. They want to be confident that any new relationship they are contemplating does not constitute a risk to themselves or their family. There would be value in making it explicit that the DVDS is a Scheme which targets those in the early stages of a relationship, regardless of whether or not they have experienced domestic violence in the past. This distinction needs to be clearly understood, and will require a different approach to marketing, promotion and referral pathways.

The relatively modest level of usage of the DVDS and the lack of any significant increase in demand over time is partly the function of program design issues

One of the biggest issues identified by all stakeholders in relation to the current model is that the only means of accessing the Scheme is by making an application in person at a police station. There is considerable support for the application process to be broadened to include an online capability either directly from the applicant, or via a support service or other avenue. This would require new guidelines and procedures – with the police contacting the applicant to clarify or seek more information before accepting the application. Many of those consulted do not see this problem as insurmountable, and think that by increasing the avenues for making an application, the demand for the Scheme will increase significantly. The implication for police resources is unknown at this stage, and would need to be investigated in the future. Other options include community services including the DVDS in their intake process and procedures, so the Scheme would not be overlooked and would ‘trigger’ consideration of the Scheme.

Aspects of the DVDS model that require further consideration include the process for determining the eligibility of applicants and the threshold of relevant offences that can be disclosed

The first of these matters relates to the need for **further guidance to police, support services and applicants about the level and type of evidence needed to demonstrate concern in order to meet the eligibility criteria for accessing the DVDS.**

The second relates to the ‘relevant offences’ that can be disclosed under the threshold. Almost all police, support services and other agencies consulted for the evaluation see the current threshold as too high.

All stakeholders **support the disclosure of ADVOs**, or at least a pattern of ADVOs, and not only breaches. A previous ADVO (or a number of ADVOs over time, or across different relationships) is regarded as indicative of a pattern of abusive behaviour that would potentially put the primary person at risk of violence or abuse. The introduction of the NDVOS is seen as an important opportunity to considerably improve the effectiveness of the DVDS, enabling it to disclose relevant legal matters from across all jurisdictions. This has been a major information gap in the system to date. It is understood that accessing ADVO information from across the country can be done quickly and easily by the NSW Police Force and would not place an undue burden on their resources.

The DVDS is also seen to be limited by not being able to access records of domestic violence offending in other jurisdictions. While the logistical, administrative and resource difficulties and implications of obtaining this information are acknowledged but not seen as insurmountable and as warranted in some cases (for example, where the POI has previously lived in another jurisdiction).

It should be noted, one of the main reasons for excluding ADVOs from the list of relevant matters that can be disclosed under the DVDS was the risk that it would lead to a greater number of contested ADVOs which would have a detrimental impact on domestic violence victims. Assessing this was beyond the scope of the current evaluation and, in any event, the number of applications is too low at this stage to assess whether this is an unintended outcome of the Scheme.

Expanding the range of non-domestic violent offences that can be disclosed beyond murder, sexual assault and child abuse was also strongly supported by some stakeholders. The main argument for this is that a person who has concerns about their safety in an intimate relationship should be able to access information about that person’s prior violent offending past more generally – even if they are not provided with the details. Expanding the range of ‘relevant offences’ that can be included would not only increase the information that a primary person can access to support decision-making, but also avoid the need for police officers responsible for the non-disclosures from having to find various roundabout ways to inform the applicant they could be at risk, which some of them find uncomfortable. It would also potentially lessen the confusion that some applicants experience in understanding exactly what message the DVLO is conveying in non-disclosure sessions.

There are differing views across LACs as to who is responsible for driving the DVDS

The NGOs were funded to promote and manage the Scheme in partnership with the NSW Police Force. The NSW Police Force rolled out a training course across all four LACs at the commencement of the Scheme. However, different understandings regarding the role of the police in promoting or driving the Scheme created tensions in some areas. In most LACs, the police responded to applications received: they see their role as primarily administrative. In one LAC, a more proactive approach was adopted whereby DVLOs were in effect driving 'a right to know' approach. If they came across a person in the course of their duty, and they knew the criminal history of the POI, they would inform the domestic violence victim about the DVDS and suggest they may like to make an application. In other words, they actively generated referrals to the DVDS where they had concerns for someone's safety based on their knowledge of the alleged perpetrator's past behaviour. However, not all police officers consulted saw this as their role. There would nevertheless seem to be some advantage in police adopting a more proactive approach and further discussion is needed to assess the desirability and feasibility of making this a more explicit component of the Scheme.

There is a strong argument for envisioning the DVDS more as a tool, than a 'Scheme'

While the DVDS is more than 'a tool' or an 'instrument' – it does not constitute a stand-alone Scheme. There is potential to increase demand for, and access to, the DVDS through repositioning and opening up the application process to a broader range of providers. The DVDS option could be built into service intake to identify suitable candidates. People from a range of agencies could be trained in how to assist applicants make a DVDS application. This approach was supported by some of those consulted in the lead up to the development of the pilot model as well as some stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation. However, a centralised point of coordination and referral would still be required, as would attendance and support at disclosure meetings. The relative advantages and disadvantages of broadening not only the means of applications (e.g. online) but the channels of support could be further considered.

Several key learnings have emerged from the pilot that will inform any future roll-out of the DVDS

These include:

- the importance of the development of a close relationship between the police (the DVLOs) and the support workers they liaise with
- that the delivery of the disclosure/non-disclosure must be undertaken by a police officer with expertise in domestic violence (i.e. a DVLO or supervisor)
- attendance by a support worker at the disclosure/non-disclosure meeting is a vital component of the Scheme
- the provision of support to applicants to complete the application form, where needed, is necessary
- the timeliness of the disclosure/non-disclosure following the date of the application is important
- the provision of options for support, at the time of, during and after the application has been processed and finalised is an important feature of the model
- the development of state-wide communication campaign based on market research to develop messages that will resonate with the target group is critical– in particular people in the early stage of their relationship who may not have had any previous contact with services
- the development of strategies to effectively engage third parties in the DVDS, upon there being further investigation of the impact on primary persons, and their relationship with third parties, as a result of an application by a third party.

The per case cost of operating the DVDS is high

Based on expenditure figures supplied by the NGOs for one year of operation, across the four pilot regions, the average cost per DVDS application is \$3,959. This cost is over and above the cost of operating the Crisis Assistance Service, and relates only to the direct cost to government through pilot program funding. It excludes resources provided by the NSW Police Force to jointly administer the Scheme, these costs having

been absorbed into operational funding. Given the relatively 'light touch' of contact with many applicants (in some cases, brief contact over a two week period), these costs are very high. A judgement needs to be made about the cost of operating the DVDS against the value that it brings to the relatively small number of individuals who use it. Clearly, it would be important to increase demand for the Scheme in order to reduce the per case cost and make it a more cost-effective proposition. There is potential to increase the number of applications and a range of options are suggested to boost demand.

6.2. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

There is limited evidence upon which to recommend continuation or expansion of the DVDS. The following options are presented for consideration in relation to DVDS model design and implementation should the program be continued and/or rolled out.

DVDS Program design

Issues	Options	Potential benefits
Critical success factors associated with the DVDS pilot model have been identified through the evaluation	1) Key features of the pilot DVDS model to be retained in any future model include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The police and support service partnership in relation to disclosure meetings ▪ The delivery of disclosure/non-disclosure by a police officer experienced in domestic violence ▪ The attendance by a support person at the disclosure meeting ▪ Support available from a support service/worker before, during and after the disclosure meeting ▪ Support provided by experienced domestic violence workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adjustments to the model based on emerging evidence
The DVDS target is unclear, or needs refinement	2) Determine whether the DVDS is exclusively an early intervention initiative or whether it can extend to others in the community who may be at risk of domestic violence and who may benefit from the Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Common understanding and agreement about who the target group is or should be ▪ Better guidance for targeting communications
The definition of 'early intervention' needs clarification	3) Clarify that 'early intervention' encompasses people in the community who have never before been in a domestic violence relationship <i>and</i> those who have been in a domestic violence relationship previously, but are entering into a new relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved marketing/promotion ▪ Extension of the pool of applicants who apply to the DVDS
The DVDS model is expensive and does not provide value for money at the current level of usage. Unless demand is increased, however valid the Scheme is to certain applicants, it would be difficult to justify ongoing funding.	4) Attempts to increase the level of demand through a number of options detailed below including changes of guidelines, access and promotion 5) Consider varying the level of DVDS funding each region in line with local population levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction in the average cost per application

DVDS Program design (cont'd)

Issues	Options	Potential benefits
The current threshold of relevant offences is too high	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) Consider lowering the threshold of relevant offences to include a prior ADVO, or a number of ADVOS over time and different relationships which indicate a pattern of behaviour 7) Consider lowering the threshold to include a broader range of non-domestic violence offences 8) Consider whether there is any scope to obtain records of prior relevant offences in other jurisdictions, in certain circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greater accuracy and transparency regarding a pattern of behaviour that may place the applicant at risk or cause them to have fears for their or their children's safety or wellbeing ▪ Police officers able to give a 'straight' disclosure rather than signals to the applicant that they may be at risk where there a non-disclosable offence ▪ Increased consistency in disclosures by police (some of whom 'stick to the script' and provide a yes/no response only, while others use language to indicate e.g. that a non-disclosure does not mean the POI does not have a violent criminal history) ▪ Reduced applicant confusion regarding the content of disclosure meetings ▪ Greater accuracy and transparency regarding a pattern of behaviour that may place the applicant at risk or cause them to fear for their or their children's safety
The current application process is a major barrier to accessing the DVDS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9) Consider introducing an online application option, with appropriate guidelines and procedures to assess eligibility and safety 10) Consider working with services to incorporate the DVDS into the suite of options to be considered at intake and referral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DVDS opened to a much larger and broader community base ▪ Reduction in cultural, logistical, privacy, safety and other barriers to accessing the Scheme through attending a police station
The preferred setting for disclosure is the police station: good for safety, authority and efficient use of police resources, but another access barrier	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11) Consider expanding the range of settings where a disclosure can be made to give the option in specific circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction in access barriers

DVDS Program implementation and roll out

Issue	Option	Benefit
The process for determining eligibility for the DVDS, including the level of evidence required to validate 'concern' is variable and in some cases, disputed	12) Consider and amend DVDS Operational Guidelines to further clarify eligibility requirements and the evidence needed to validate concern, and provide examples to illustrate 13) Publicise the criteria used to determine eligibility and what signifies 'risk' and 'concern' in the service system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased consistency in assessing DVDS applications Fewer disagreements between police and NGO partners regarding the legitimacy of applications
Significant efforts to promote the DVDS have been inefficient, misguided and largely unsuccessful	14) Develop a whole-of-community social marketing campaign, in consultation with providers and informed by market research – developed using social marketing experts and consider centralising marketing and communications efforts 15) Depending upon clarification of DVDS target group, ensure all promotion and marketing is segmented to resonate with each target audience 16) Focus more on third-parties as potential applicants to the DVDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased community reach and resonance Increased demand for the DVDS
The number of applications by third party applicants is low. Third party applicant cases can be complex and difficult to manage	17) Clarify the support third party applicants can access through the DVDS 18) Convene a meeting of Women NSW, NGOs and the Police to discuss the complex issues that third party applications can give rise to, and of how guidelines, processes and practices can be improved in third party applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth in applications from third parties Improved processes for managing third party applications
Access to the DVDS has been limited for some groups, including people from CALD backgrounds, LGBTQI and people with disability	19) Develop communications and engagement strategies for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People who identify as LGBTQI People with disability People from CALD communities People who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or People living in remote locations 20) Draw on successes that the pilots have had in engaging members of the local Aboriginal community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased demand from a broader range of community members

DVDS Program implementation and roll out (cont'd)

Issue	Option	Benefit
The scope, quality and consistency program and financial data needs improvement	21) Refine and refresh the program data set to focus on recording what matters most for implementation, monitoring and program improvement 22) Consider introducing an applicant survey upon exit from the DVDS as a standard procedure to capture satisfaction and impact 23) Explore the feasibility of the NSW Police Force recording or collating the number of DVDS applications rejected and the reasons why and providing a specific and accurate data on the nature of relevant offences disclosed 24) Improve financial reporting to facilitate cost-efficiency and other economic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved monitoring and evaluation Reduced data recording and reporting burden
There is a need to consolidate the learnings from the pilot evaluation, the NGOs, the police and Women NSW in any subsequent roll-out of the DVDS	25) Establish a formal communication mechanism for all future pilots to share experiences, learnings and ideas for practice improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everyone is 'on the same page' regarding the DVDS target groups, the scope of the support service, data collection and reporting Momentum maintained and strengthened
There is a need to hear from more applicants about the impact and outcomes of using the DVDS	26) Invest in specific strategies to obtain more applicant feedback (both quantitative and qualitative) using a standardised form to gauge the level of satisfaction, more in depth inquiry (e.g. through interviews) and potentially digital means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More meaningfully test the role access to intervene and support obtained through the DVDS has played on applicant decision-making and safety
Critical success factors for the implementation of the DVDS have been identified	27) Include any subsequent roll-out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DVDS training for all General Duties Officers in participating LACs and inclusion of DVDS in induction training Joint DVDS training of key personnel from the LAC and the support service Engage Local Area Commanders in promoting the Scheme Clear and comprehensive DVDS Operational Guidelines available to police and support services Case studies and examples of DVDS to educate and promote the Scheme and its potential benefits in concrete terms A mechanism to communicate and develop learnings across pilot sites Strong program management by the government funding body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved efficiency and effectiveness

7. CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

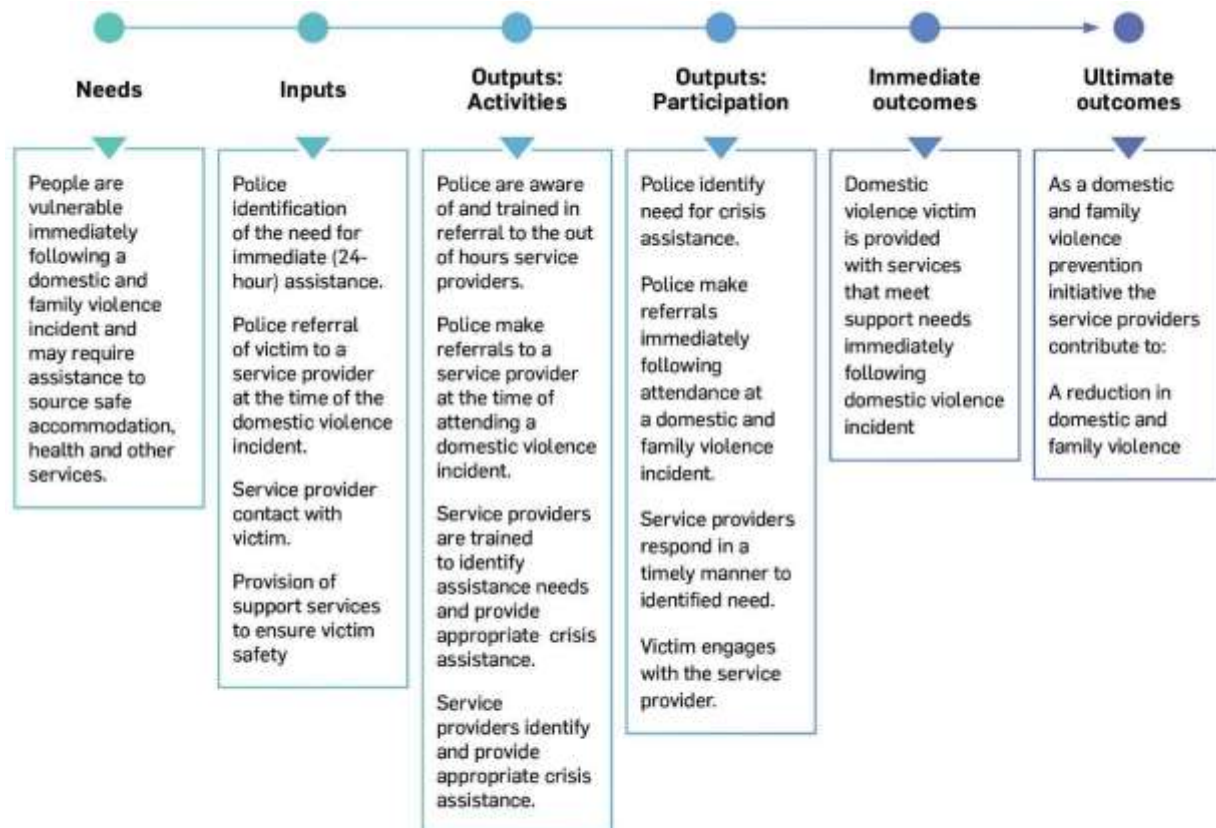
7.1. INTRODUCTION

The Crisis Assistance Service is designed to provide 24/7 service support to victims of domestic and family violence in the immediate aftermath of an incident. Uptake of the Crisis Assistance Service by the victim is voluntary.

Each support service is contracted to have service delivery infrastructure in place to deliver direct operation of services to all areas of the LAC. This includes assistance to victims through the provision of transport to ensure safety; access to temporary housing; basic emergency supplies for victims and their children such as food, toiletries and toys; as well as ongoing support and service linkages. This may include victim intake and assessment, crisis support and referrals to various services including counselling, legal/court assistance, parenting support, accommodation, housing and financial support. The Crisis Assistance Service pilot is designed to assist police by providing crisis assistance for victims (including DVDS applicants where necessary) in the immediate aftermath of domestic violence by addressing current service gaps and complementing current responses (such as the WDVCS program) to enable their access to emergency accommodation and other support (Documentation supplied by NSW Department of Family and Community Services). The service is available 24 hours a day. The Crisis Assistance Service is driven by the NSW Police Force, as the sole point of referral to the Scheme.

The NSW Police Force in the pilot LACs, at the time of or following a domestic and family violence incident, can refer the victim to the service providers for crisis assistance. The victim must consent to the referral. The partnership between service providers and the police aims to support victims of domestic violence, but can also assist police to concentrate on policing matters relating to the domestic violence incident. While no formal aims or objectives have been specified for the Crisis Assistance Service, a program logic setting out needs, inputs, activities and outcomes was developed (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9 – Crisis Assistance Service Program Logic



Assumptions:

Police will refer domestic violence victims to a service provider when attending a domestic and family violence incident; domestic and family violence victims will willingly engage with crisis assistance services, the services provided to the victims will address their immediate needs.

7.2. NUMBER OF PEOPLE REFERRED

A total of 271 clients were referred by the four LACs to the Crisis Assistance Service between April 2016 and October 2017. The distribution across the four LACs is detailed in Figure 8 below. The greatest number of referrals occurred in Oxley, followed by St George, Shoalhaven and Sutherland.

The number of referrals has remained fairly consistent over the 19 months of the pilot – **averaging approximately five calls per LAC each month**. There has been a slight increase in calls from June 2017, but this is mainly attributed to an increase in the number of crisis calls received from the Oxley LAC only, with no change in the number of calls in the other three LACs (see Figure 11). The number of crisis referrals has remained fairly steady over time in the remaining three pilots. The number of crisis referrals is considered surprisingly low by all services and by some DVLOs. Furthermore, their expectation that service demand would rise as more police became aware of the Service has not eventuated.

Figure 10 – Number of Crisis Assistance Service referrals by LAC: April 2016 to October 2017

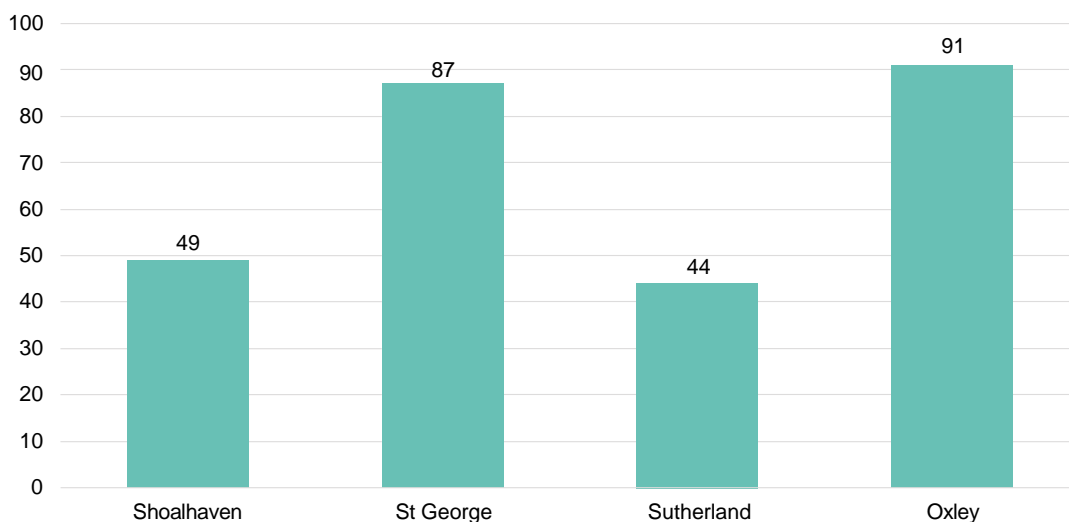
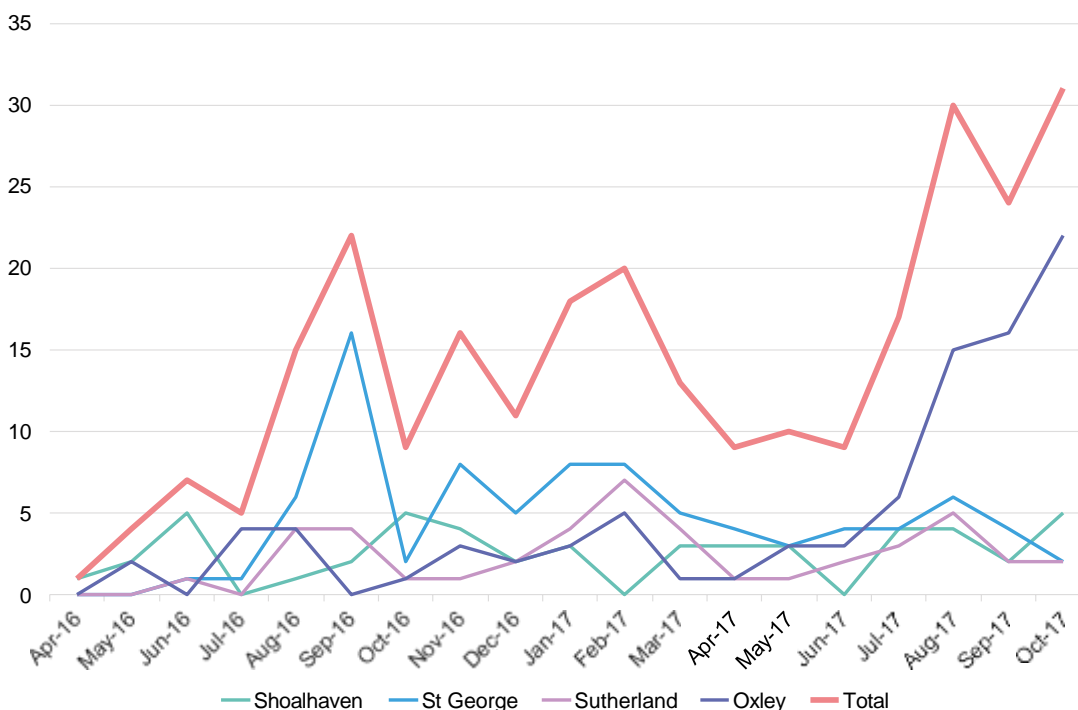


Figure 11 – Number of Crisis Assistance Service referrals per month, by LAC: April 2016 to October 2017



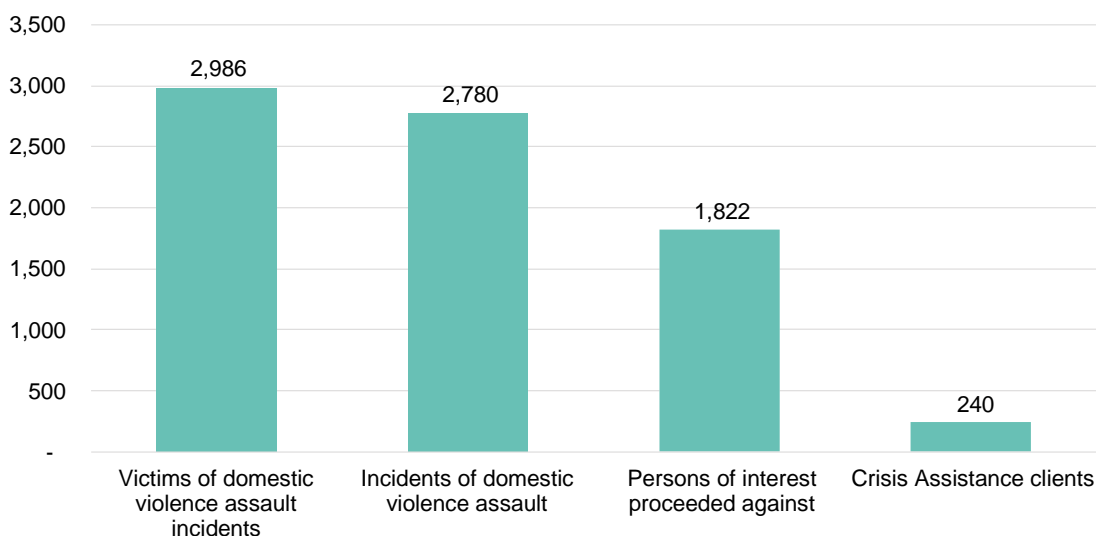
7.3. REFERRAL

It is important to assess the use of the Crisis Assistance Service relative to potential demand in each LAC.

There is no measure of the number of domestic violence incidents attended by police that constitute a crisis. It is therefore not possible to assess the proportion of crisis incidents in the four LACs that resulted in a referral to the Crisis Assistance Service.

As a proxy, the number of referrals to the Crisis Assistance Service was compared with police data (provided by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research) on the number of domestic violence incidents occurring in each LAC. This comparison is detailed below in Figure 12. (Note comparisons are only available for the period April 2016 and September 2017: October 2017 data is excluded). It is acknowledged not all domestic violence incidents involve a crisis and not all victims would agree to a crisis referral. Nevertheless, the comparison with the number of domestic violence incidents over the same period does place the crisis referrals in some context.

Figure 12 – Number of Crisis Assistance Service referrals compared to domestic violence assaults, victims and POIs proceeded against: April 2016 to September 2017



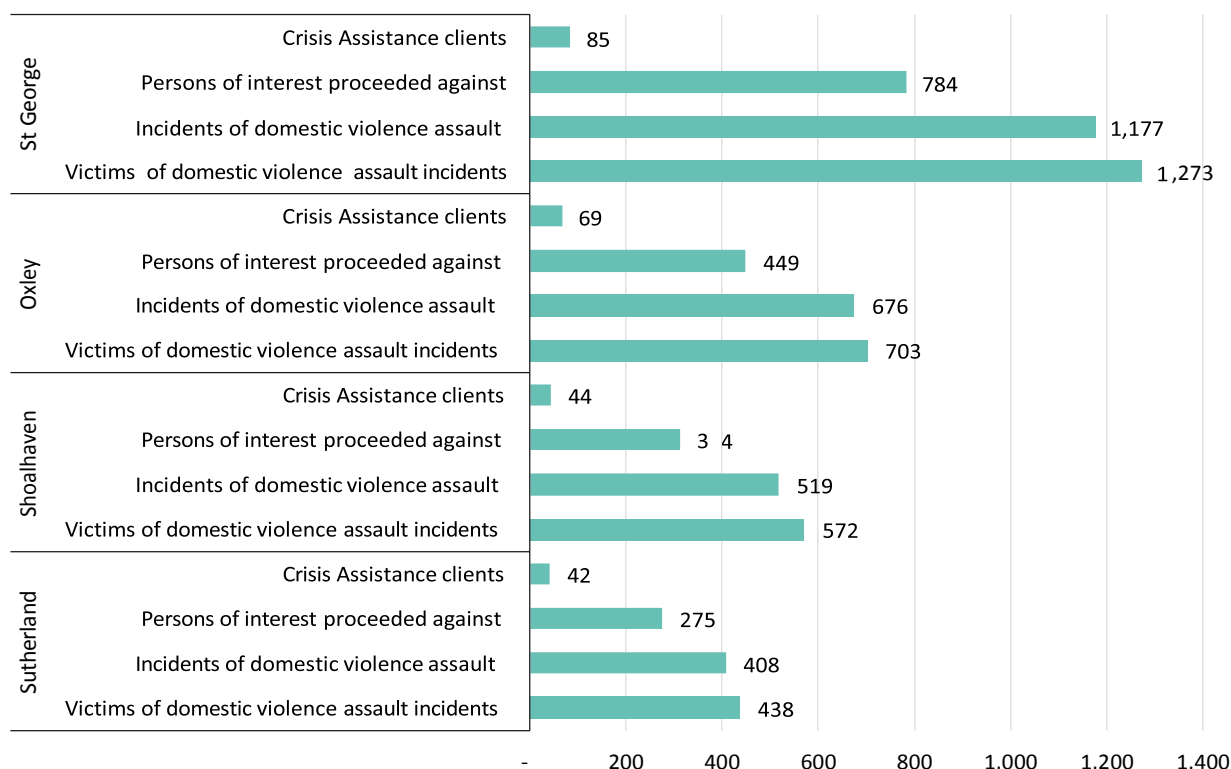
(Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research)

Extrapolating from the figures reported by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, the 271 clients referred to the Crisis Assistance Service in the above period represent:

- 8.6% of the 2,780 incidents of domestic violence assault
- 13.2% of the 1,822 POI proceeded against (i.e. where one or more charges were laid)
- 8% of the 2,986 victims of domestic violence assault incidents.

This broad pattern was evident across all four LACs. However, the rate of Crisis Assistance Service referrals was marginally higher in Oxley and Sutherland than in St George and Shoalhaven. One might expect crisis referrals to be higher in a regional context due to there being fewer local resources available. On the other hand, crisis referrals might be lower in a regional area due to the large geographic spread of the LAC. A larger sample would be required to test and map the relationship between the rate of referral and local services. The Crisis Assistance Service sample is too small to assess whether these minor variations are statistically significant.

Figure 13 – Number of Crisis Assistance Service referrals compared to domestic violence assaults, victims and POIs proceeded against, by LAC: April 2016 to September 2017, by LAC



(Sources: Crisis Assistance Service program data and the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research)

7.4. POSSIBLE REASONS FOR LOW REFERRAL TO THE CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

The Crisis Assistance Services was introduced at a time when many other domestic violence reforms were being introduced. A range of reasons were identified in consultations to explain the low rate of referral to the Crisis Assistance Service.

Table 10 – Possible reasons for the low number of referrals to the Crisis Assistance Service

Statement	Potential reasons
The launch of the Crisis Assistance Service coincided with other major domestic violence reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These include Safer Pathway and the introduction of Domestic Violence Evidence-in Chief: these initiatives increased the number of procedures police need to follow after attending a domestic violence incident, and in the case of Safer Pathway, provided a mechanism whereby all victims are referred by police to a Local Coordination Point (LCP) for support These had a very high priority for police and required significant changes to the policing of domestic violence incidents There is a common view that in this context, the new crisis service became lost and seen of lesser importance to the policing of domestic violence incidents

Statement	Potential reasons
The launch of the Crisis Assistance Service was 'soft' and lacked sufficient 'top-down' support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As noted earlier, unlike the DVDS, no formal mandatory Crisis Assistance Service training was developed and delivered to all General Duties Officers in the pilot LACs. The Crisis Assistance Service lacked a strong profile, identity definition and vision. No standard collateral was produced for use across the LACs to explain the purpose and objectives of the pilot and provide operational guidance. Promoting the service was mainly left to DVLOs and to the Crisis Assistance Services through day-to-day operations and meetings. The DVLOs made extensive effort to promote the scheme internally – but with only 1 or 2 in each LAC, and with up to 300 General Duties Officers in some LACs, the task was considerable. With one exception, strong leadership within the LAC to drive and monitor the pilot appeared to be lacking: it was largely left to DVLOs and Domestic Violence Coordinators to drive the Scheme in each Region.
General Duties Officers were reportedly confused about the range of domestic violence and other crisis support services available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DVLOs made frequent reference to General Duties Officers expressing confusion about the range of domestic violence crisis support numbers and services they can potentially call upon. These include the national DV Hotline (1800 Respect), Rape and Domestic Violence Australia, the NSW Domestic Violence Line, Safer Pathway, and in some cases local service providers who also provide 24-hour domestic violence hotlines Perceptions of duplication and a lack of clarity as to who does what in this crowded service landscape has impacted negatively on the rate of referrals to the Crisis Assistance Service.
General Duties Officers do not see the benefit of referring to the Crisis Assistance Service given that another service (the LCP) will call the victim within hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders reported many General Duties Officers neither understand nor see the value in making a referral to the Crisis Assistance Service when they know someone from the Local Coordination Point (LCP) will call the victim within hours of them receiving information about the domestic violence incident: 100% of which are referred to the LCP. In a few cases, negative experiences of utilising the Crisis Assistance Service have also impacted referrals from police.
General Duties Officers commonly perceive the Crisis Assistance Service to be used only/mainly when there is an urgent need for accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This perception, reported by both DVLOs and Crisis Assistance Service providers, has effectively narrowed the cases when General Duties Officers think a crisis referral is appropriate or needed Many police officers do not see the need to make a referral, if the victim is not in immediate danger (e.g. the alleged perpetrator has been taken into custody). The victim, however, may be in a state of shock or crisis.
Lack of accountability/ monitoring of police implementation of the Crisis Assistance Service within most LACs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With one exception, this limited the steps that DVLOs have been able to take to boost referrals (other than conducting numerous education sessions) and increase accountability for implementation of the pilot.

Statement	Potential reasons
Not all people who are offered referral to the Crisis Assistance Service take up the offer of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in the Crisis Assistance Service is voluntary; there is obligation to accept the offer of support. Some domestic violence victims may already be in contact with support services, have family or friends available to assist, not see themselves as needing or wanting any support in the immediate aftermath of the incident (especially when they are advised that someone from the LCP will call them within a few hours) or be fearful of involving external agencies. The willingness or otherwise of accepting the offer of referral is likely to be predicated upon the way that the request is made by police and how the service is described. There is no direct evidence of this however (the scope of the high level review of the Crisis Assistance Service did not allow for interviews with domestic violence victims who were not referred to the service).

As no formal business case or planning was undertaken prior to the introduction of the Crisis Assistance Service, there are no service targets or indications of expected level of demand for the new initiative. Neither is there any data on the proportion of domestic violence incidents where the victim is considered to be in a crisis situation. Moreover, the definition of crisis varies and is not clearly defined.

However, in the view of the Crisis Assistance Services and some (but not all) DVLOs, these numbers are disappointingly low, and lower than expected. A degree of frustration is evident amongst many of those consulted as to why the Crisis Assistance Service has not gained more traction with General Duties Officers in any of the pilot areas despite considerable efforts by DVLOs in particular to drive the service within each LAC. Consequently, some police representatives are beginning to question whether the outcomes achieved (judged mainly in terms of the number of referrals) justify the effort and resources expended on promoting the service internally.

7.5. REASONS FOR REFERRAL TO THE CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

The main reasons for the crisis referral were physical abuse (52%) and threats of violence against the victim, their children or other family members (46%). A small number (4%) of cases involved sexual abuse (see Table 11).

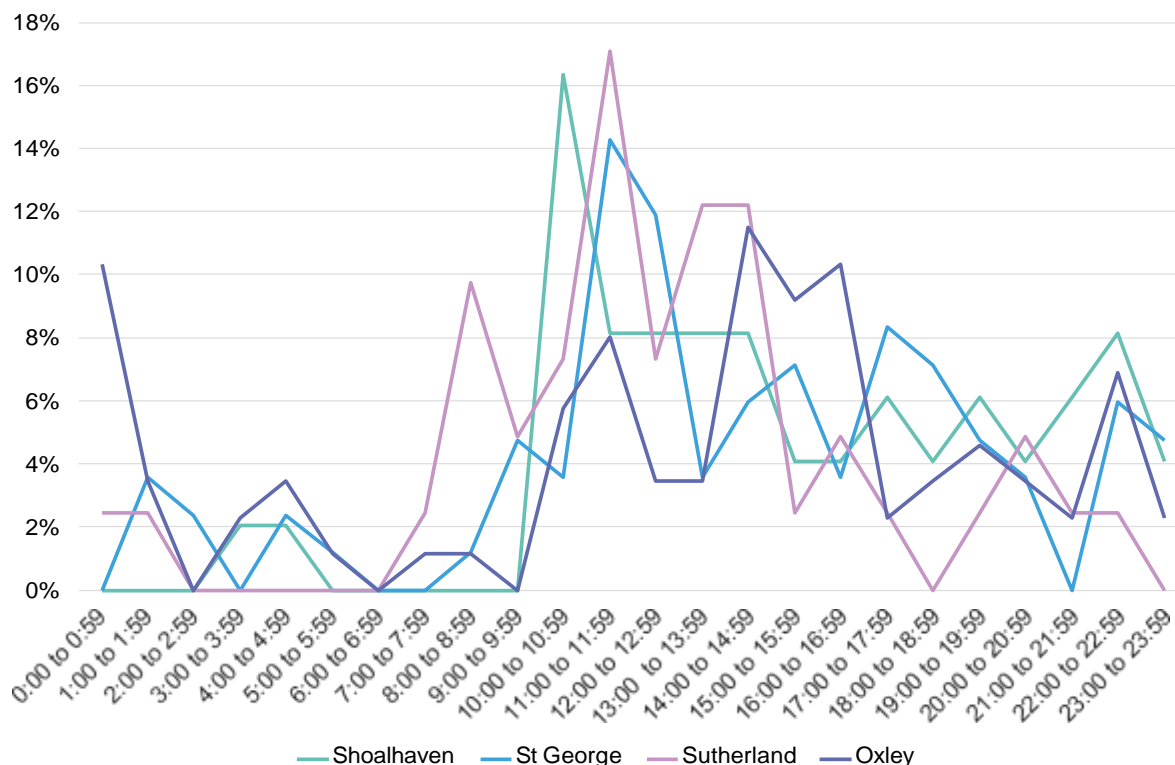
Table 11 – Reasons for crisis referral (multiple responses)

Reason for call	Number of clients	% of clients
Physical abuse	141	52%
Threats of violence against primary person	83	31%
Harassment	45	17%
Threats of violence against family	20	7%
Threats of violence against children	16	6%
Sexual abuse	11	4%

7.6. TIMING OF CRISIS CALL REFERRALS

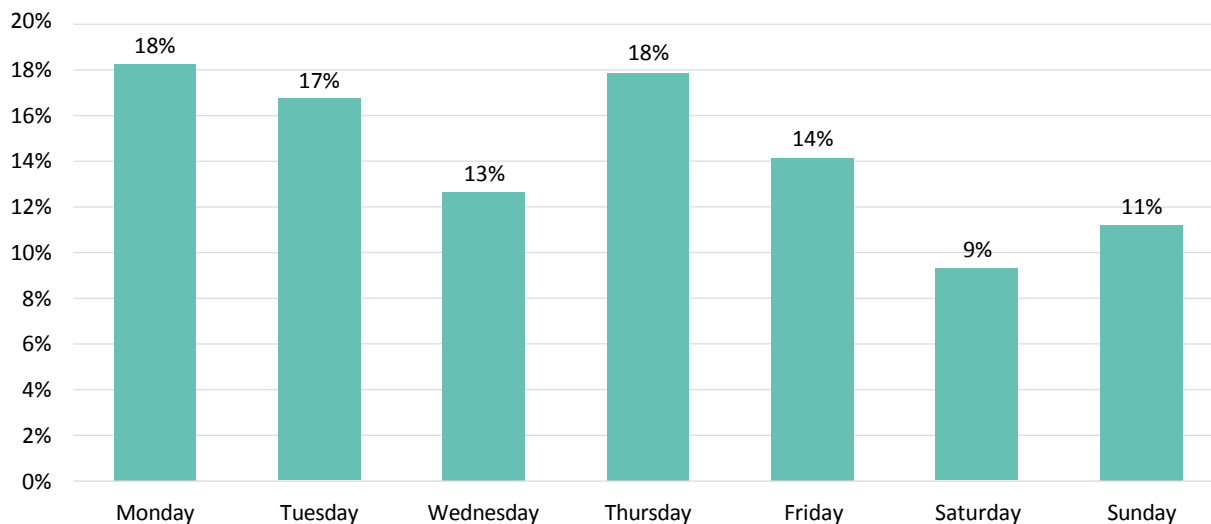
The crisis call referrals were received throughout the 24 hour period, but most commonly occurred during the day: over half (56%) of the referrals were made between 9am and 5pm. The second most common time was between 5pm and midnight – when a further 30% of calls occurred. The remaining 15% occurred between midnight and 9am (see Figure 14). This pattern was evident across all LACs.

Figure 14 – Proportion of calls to Crisis Assistance Service by time of day: April 2016 to October 2017



The great majority of calls were made during weekdays: with fewer calls made on the weekend. Only one in five (20%) crisis referrals (55 calls in total) were made to the Crisis Assistance Service on a Saturday or Sunday in the 18 months from April 2016 to September 2017 (see Figure 15).

Figure 15 – Proportion of calls to Crisis Assistance Service by day of the week: April 2016 to October 2017



Further analysis reveals that just over half (51%) of all crisis call-outs were made after hours i.e. between 5pm and 9am on weekdays or any time over the weekend

One of the gaps the service was designed to fill related to after-hours crisis support. It is therefore surprising that the Crisis Assistance Service has not been more heavily utilised out of hours, especially on weekends, which is known to be the busiest time for the police attending domestic violence incidents. Research by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research indicates that 36% of domestic violent assaults occur on a Saturday or Sunday, and that peak hours during which domestic assaults are reported to police is between 6pm and 9pm (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2011).

7.7. CLIENT PROFILE

7.7.1. Demographics

A summary of the profile of the clients referred to the Crisis Assistance Service is detailed in section 7.7.

The majority of clients referred:

- are female (93%)
- have children (51%), most of whom are 12 years or younger
- are aged under 45 years (57%).¹

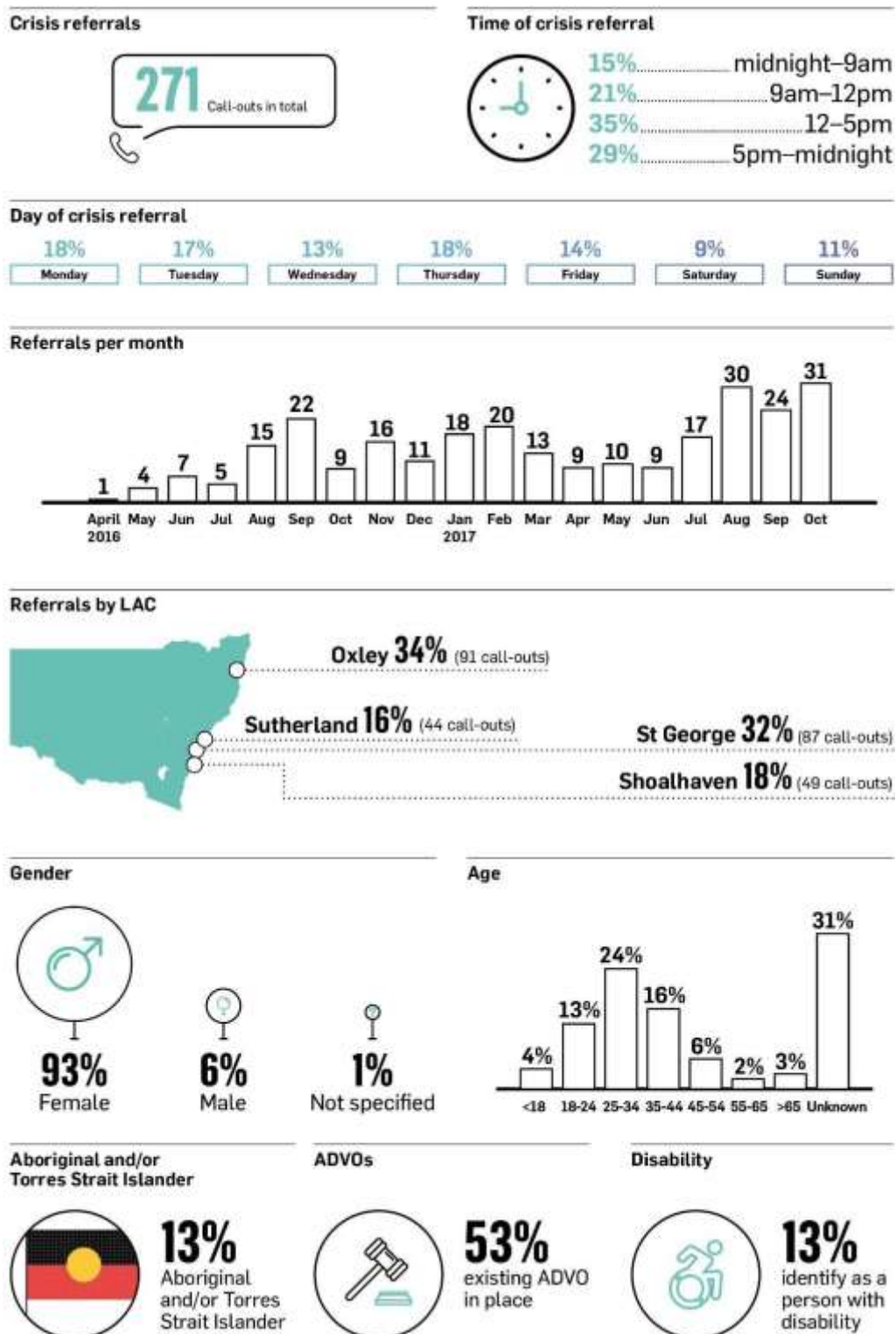
A substantial minority of clients:

- identified as having a disability (13%)
- identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (13%).

It is possible the proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and people with a disability is higher – but this status was *not recorded* for about one in four clients. Nevertheless, the proportion of clients identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders is considerably relative to their numbers in the general population. This may reflect the increased rate of domestic violence reported to the police and that one of the pilot LACs has a high Aboriginal population. CALD or LGBTQI status was not analysed either due to poor data quality or a lack of data.

¹ NB. There was a large proportion of unknown responses to age

Figure 16 Summary of Crisis Assistance Service referrals mid-April 2016 – October 2017



7.7.2. Living arrangements and legal proceedings

Similar proportions of clients referred to the Crisis Assistance Service were living with the alleged perpetrator and not living with the alleged perpetrator (41% in each case) (Note that living arrangements were not recorded in 18% of cases).

Over half the clients (53%) had an ADVO in place against the alleged perpetrator indicating that for many, this was not the first time they had had contact with the legal system in relation to domestic violence.

7.8. SUPPORT RECEIVED

Just over half (51%) the crisis referrals resulted in a personal meeting with the client. Most commonly this took place at the police station (28%), the support service (6%), the client's home (3%) or a hospital (3%).

In over a third of cases (36%), there was no face-to-face contact with the client: the matter was dealt with over the telephone. (Nature of contact not recorded in 13% of cases.)

Crisis Assistance Service clients accessed a range of supports. Most commonly, safety planning (34%), referrals to crisis accommodation (27%) and counselling (15%). This pattern was broadly consistent across the four LACs: however support with safety planning, crisis accommodation, and assistance with transport and financial support was somewhat higher in the regional LACs. It is not possible to enumerate the number of contacts the Crisis Assistance Service had with clients.

In some cases, phone call contact is all that is required. The Crisis Assistance Service worker makes phone contact with the client initially, talks with them, gains a picture of the incident, assesses the level of risk and urgency of the need, and provides emotional or practical support and/or information. In some cases, a decision is made that no other immediate support is required, at that time, in which case the worker takes case notes and informs the client that they will receive a call from someone in the morning (preferably using the first name of the LCP worker to 'warm up' the referral). The worker contacts the LCP in the morning, passing on information obtained from the contact with the client. The LCP then handles the matter from there. That can sometimes be the extent of the client contact with the Crisis Assistance Service.

Where the client needs more immediate support in the aftermath of the domestic violence incident, the crisis worker can provide assistance with, say, obtaining suitable crisis accommodation (for example, advocating to obtain crisis accommodation close to home or schools, organising travel where possible, providing emergency packs containing tooth brushes, sanitary items etc). This may or may not involve face to face contact.

Face to face contact typically occurs when the client has been removed from the home and is waiting at the police station to make a statement, or needs somewhere safe and comfortable where she and her children can wait until they go to the accommodation, be it in a refuge, motel etc. This is a time when the crisis worker can provide emotional support to the client, help with practical arrangements for that day or night, and if needed, attend the police station with the client to be with her while she makes a statement or gives Evidence-in-Chief. The worker and the client may meet at the station, in a nearby cafe, or sometimes at the Crisis Assistance Service premises which are family-friendly (most operate family support services). It should be noted that unlike some other domestic violence crisis service models, the Crisis Assistance Service workers do not attend the home of the client.

In the days after the crisis referral, the crisis worker will typically 'check in' with the client by phone to see if they need or want any more assistance. This can involve providing more personal support and linking clients to other supports as needed. It may or may not involve further personal contact – that is at the discretion of the client.

There is no information recorded on the length of contact with individual clients - but most commonly it seems to be two or three contacts, but there were cases that reportedly involved up to five or more contacts. Whether this reflected need, a lack of other supports and/or the crisis service having the capacity to support the person for longer, is hard to say. However, it does again raise the question of the scope of the crisis service component and the extent to which it is consistently understood and applied.

Table 12 – Support received by Crisis Assistance Service clients: April 2016 to October 2017 (multiple response)

Crisis Assistance responses	Shoalhaven (n=49)	St George (n=87)	Sutherland (n=44)	Oxley (n=91)	Total (n=271)
Safety planning	41%	24%	20%	46%	34%
Referral to crisis accommodation	63%	6%	20%	32%	27%
Referral to counselling	14%	14%	11%	20%	15%
Referral for housing assistance	2%	5%	11%	21%	11%
Assistance with transport	14%	2%	5%	15%	9%
Referral for financial assistance	14%	3%	2%	10%	7%
Referral to legal services	10%	2%	2%	8%	6%
Referral to child health team	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%
Referral for child care	0%	0%	2%	1%	1%

The complexity and stress of the domestic violence incident made it difficult for Crisis Assistance Service clients to separate out the support and services that they had received specifically from the Crisis Assistance Service. This was especially the case if they had already been receiving support (sometimes from the organisation that auspices the service). Only a small number of Crisis Assistance Service clients were interviewed (6), but their feedback on the support received was nevertheless informative.

Table 13 – Support received by Crisis Assistance Service clients

Support	Details	Examples
Ongoing support or counselling	<p>This was one of the most common supports received by clients interviewed.</p> <p>Many reported getting weekly or fortnightly phone calls to 'check in' while others received more formal counselling.</p>	<p><i>What I've used is just basically the ongoing counselling and basically I've always got someone there to talk to.</i></p> <p><i>I received a lot of positive talk and reinforcement that I was indeed doing the right thing.</i></p>
Housing support	<p>The housing support provided included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> access to a refuge referrals to homelessness services rent assistance assistance with finding accommodation. 	<p><i>She helped me do housing applications. She helped me start looking for a house.</i></p> <p><i>They helped me with my rent as well because I get rent assistance and I pay so much and then they part-pay a subsidy to it as well.</i></p>
Referrals to other services	<p>Clients received referrals to several other services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> domestic violence education services health and pre-natal care Staying Home Leaving Violence peer support groups. 	<p><i>I was also referred to the local Family Support Service where my kids and I found a tremendous amount of support and participated in several courses/workshops to help us process what we had been through.</i></p> <p><i>I'm going to be getting security upgrades to the house for my protection.</i></p>

Support	Details	Examples
Referral to make an application under the DVDS	Four of the clients interviewed identified that their support worker had made them aware of the DVDS and, in some cases had attended the disclosure meeting as their support person.	<i>I had someone who helped me apply for, I forget what it's called, where you go in and find out his history just to see what he's really like I guess.</i> <i>She came and supported me when I actually had the [DVDS] interview.</i>
Support with court proceedings	Several clients reported that a support worker attended court proceedings and had assisted them in navigating the court process, including providing referrals to family law specialists.	<i>A support officer was made available to attend the court hearing.</i> <i>They'll be there with me through the court. They'll always ring the police to find out what was going on and when's the next court and stuff like that.</i>

7.9. CLIENT FEEDBACK

As noted previously, it was often difficult for clients to isolate their specific experience of the Crisis Assistance Service. The following section reflects what the clients interviewed believe to be the services provided by the Crisis Assistance Service but may include services and supports provided by programs or services to which they were referred. A number of clients were already in contact with support services before the crisis referral. Some had been assisted through the LCP after the domestic violence incident and been referred to other support services. Although only a very small number of clients were interviewed to bring a consumer voice to the review, their experiences highlight the difficulty in attempting to isolate the impact of one specific support, in a multi-service context.

The clients interviewed reported varying experiences of referral to the Crisis Assistance Service.

- Some clients were informed by police that a support service was going to call after attending an incident and the support worker calling within days of the incident:

I just remember they told me that a lady from the domestic violence team or something was going to ring me up, get in contact with me that's all I sort of remember him saying.

They mentioned that there was all different services and that because it was a domestic violence they would be referring me to a service... I'm pretty sure it [receiving a phone call from the Crisis Assistance Service] was the next day.

- One client attended a police station after suddenly leaving an abusive relationship and was referred to a refuge run by the same organisation that provides the Crisis Assistance Service:

I actually went to police and they put me into a refuge that was supported by that company [that provides the Crisis Assistance Service].

- One client was referred by police to the Crisis Assistance Service after attending the police station to report an incident and to make a statement:

I went to the police station to report domestic violence and was referred to [Crisis Assistance Service].

- One client received a letter from police with referral information after an incident where police were called out.

The letter said something about there could be something they may be able to help me with.

Several clients interviewed said they had been made aware of several services, or that they had been contacted after a crisis incident. For some, this provided important support at a highly stressful time.

Well, when I reported it, the support services just called me. They just called. I had heaps of calls from all different areas... You don't really know what's going on. You've never been through it before. Well, I hadn't been through it before so – but it is good because you've got a lot of people calling you and making sure you're okay.

For others, the different supports offered were confusing which they said made it difficult for them to understand what support was being offered, or what would be most useful to their situation.

At the time it was quite overwhelming. So they were offering me different things but I can't say that I can remember anything or anyone in particular.

The amount of contact clients had with the Crisis Assistance Service varied. The main factor influencing the duration and intensity of contact was the level of support the client was already accessing. Those clients who were not receiving any support before the crisis incident tended to be in contact with the Crisis Assistance Service support worker on a weekly or fortnightly basis or over a longer period (in one case, for over six months). Clearly this suggests that some clients have received more than crisis assistance from the Crisis Assistance Service. This raises the question of how 'crisis assistance' has been defined by the NGOs. (It is also possible that some clients have confused who they have received ongoing support from.)

Clients interviewed were satisfied with the support provided and identified several positive aspects including:

- feeling supported at a very stressful time
- better understanding of the complexity of abusive relationships
- receiving support to help them end the relationship or to sever contact with their abusive partner
- gaining the range of supports on offer
- the availability of support when it is most needed.

One client also made specific mention of the advantage of the Crisis Assistance Service in their pilot site being located at the police station: as they believed that this made it easier for people experiencing abusive to access the service.

The [Crisis Assistance Service] being located in the police station is excellent as it makes it much easier for victims to access the service. I think if their office was separate to the station, many victims would not end up utilising the service due in part to lack of self-confidence, lack of understanding what exactly the service can do for them and the general thinking of, oh no, not another place and appointment I have to go to.

Clients were asked to identify any improvements that could be made to the Crisis Assistance Service. Most were not able to identify any areas that could be improved, and reiterated their appreciation of the support they had received. However, one client said their support worker had left the Crisis Assistance Service but they had not been informed and were not able to access support for a period of time after this.

But the only problem I really have is like there was a domestic violence worker that I used to work with ... and no one, they didn't tell us she'd left and we didn't know what was happening. We had appointments with her and she didn't show up or anything so we never got told that she'd left.

7.10. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

7.10.1. Implementation strengths

The following aspects of the implementation of the Crisis Assistance Service progressed well:

The Crisis Assistance Service funding went to well-established domestic violence support services, all of which provided some kind of crisis support prior to the launch of the program. This meant that the Crisis Assistance Service was quickly staffed (mainly from internal resources) by family and domestic violence workers and there were no delays in commencing the pilot.

Many of the services had pre-existing relationships with the local LAC through other programs and services they provided in the area. Again, this meant that in most cases the pilot could 'get off the ground' reasonably quickly, and build on pre-existing relationships – particularly with the DVLOs. This was particularly evident in one pilot which was co-located with the NSW Police Force.

DVLOs and some support services have worked hard to continually promote the Crisis Assistance Service to General Duties Officers. This included regular briefings with General Duties Officers, sessions in orientation of new staff, regular reminders to place about the crisis service and follow up where crisis support might have been of assistance but did not occur.

The Crisis Assistance Scheme was viewed by many as a service expansion rather than a new stand-alone service. It was not a new concept with which people had to become familiar: it was designed to meet a service gap and to expand crisis support to police, especially in out-of-hours. While at one level, this meant it was relatively straightforward for the support service to commence operations, this did have consequences for how other stakeholders understood the service and responded to it.

The small number of clients interviewed were satisfied with their experiences with support services. However, the numbers are very small, and many if not most clients were confused about which service they were dealing with and were unable to distinguish the Crisis Assistance Service from other supports they had received previously or subsequent to the incident that led to the police referral. More research could be required to test the level of satisfaction overall.

7.10.2. Implementation challenges

Various aspects of the implementation of the Crisis Assistance Service were problematic. These challenges related to implementation issues, but more commonly to aspects of the service model and positioning.

There is disagreement amongst stakeholders as to the adequacy, level and extent of training provided to General Duties Officers on the Crisis Assistance Service. Training on the Crisis Assistance Service did not take place at the same time as the DVDS training package rolled out across the four pilot LACs. As noted previously, according to all police and support services interviewed, no comprehensive program of mandatory training was provided to General Duties Officers on the Crisis Assistance Services across the pilot LACs and no guidelines provided on its implementation.

In one or two locations, police reported some problems in being able to obtain a timely response from the Crisis Assistance Services after hours. There were various reports (from DVLOs reporting on feedback from General Duties Officers) that on some occasions, General Duties Officers had reached an answering service when they had called the Crisis Assistance Service number or directed to call another number. On a couple of occasions, the phone rang out. On other occasions, they were told someone would call back, but that call was not made until some time later – which was too late from the police officers' perspective. According to DVLOs, such (non) responses only needs to occur once for police officers to take the view that the service is not worth calling and negative 'word of mouth' feedback to this effect can spread very quickly within a police station.

Referrals to the Crisis Assistance Services reportedly came from a very small pool of General Duties Officers. We were informed by police and crisis services that the bulk of the Crisis Assistance Service referrals came from a handful of officers. Combined with the fact that only one third of the police stations in the LACs made a referral to the service, this is further evidence of very fragmented engagement in the service by police. This indicates there has not been a system-wide implementation of the pilot and that only individual police officers are referring to the service at present.

There was confusion and potential duplication between the police and the LCP regarding the CAS and the DVDS. Reporting systems made it difficult for the LCP to determine whether a DVDS or a Crisis Assistance Service call out had occurred and for police to understand which service was providing support.

7.11. COST OF OPERATING THE CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

The background to the level of funding of the Crisis Assistance Service has been previously described in detail at Section 5.6.

The exact same caveats and cautions regarding the accuracy of the financial data provided that applied to the DVDS apply to the Crisis Assistance Service

Based on information provided by the three NGOs operating the four pilots, the total cost of operating the Crisis Assistance Service in the 12 month period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 was \$601,427.

This results in **an average cost of \$3,831 per crisis referral** received in that 12 month period. The cost per referral varied considerably across the four pilot areas given that two LACs had double the number of calls than the other two LACs.

Notwithstanding the caveats about the accuracy of these costings, they do suggest that the per cost case of the Crisis Assistance Service is high given the current level of utilisation and the fact the scheme is designed to be a crisis, rather than a casework service. The cost of operating an out-of-hours service and having people 'on call' 24/7 is considerable, however, and is clearly a factor that adds to the cost of operating the service (compared to the DVDS which is, in most cases, operates within normal business hours).

7.12. KEY FINDINGS

The Crisis Assistance Service has provided support to people in the immediate aftermath of a domestic violence incident

This support includes talking to victims of domestic violence to assess their immediate emotional well-being and safety, their need for emergency accommodation and other immediate practical assistance. Where needed, they also personally meet with the victim of domestic violence, most commonly at the police station or another safe place nearby. They provide emotional support to distressed victims, which can assist police when taking statements. This support meets a gap in the current service system, after hours (on weekdays) and on weekends, when many other support services are not operational.

The Crisis Assistance Service has been an important means of referring people to a wide range of support services in line with their needs

Safety planning, referral to crisis accommodation and counselling have been the main supports provided by or through referral from the Crisis Assistance Service. Assistance with referral to housing, transport, financial, legal and child services has also been provided. The small number of clients interviewed value and appreciate the support, and are satisfied with services received. They value both the timing and the range of supports available to them at a time of extreme stress. However, they find it difficult to differentiate the various services upon offer, and in many cases could not specifically identify the Crisis Assistance Service from other supports. In a number of cases, they have already been receiving support from domestic violence services, and the crisis referrals linked them back into that service.

The Crisis Assistance Service has worked effectively with WDVCS and LCPs

It has provided valuable information to the LCPs on clients contacted after hours. This has given the LCPs a greater understanding of the client's situation (more than they might otherwise have gained from their phone call to the client) especially where the support worker from the Crisis Assistance Service has had a face-to-face meeting with the client. Clients are sometimes more receptive to the LCP phone call in the morning as there has effectively been a 'warm referral' from the Crisis Assistance Service. The fact that some of the contracted NGOs also run the WDVCS and/or the LCP has supported the development of effective working partnerships between the services.

The unique value of the Crisis Assistance Service is that it can engage with domestic violence victims at the point of crisis – where they may be more amenable to accepting support than several hours later – when some of the immediate emergency has died down and the client may have come under pressure from others (e.g. the perpetrator's family) not to take any action. It can also offer face-to-face support (which no other crisis services does) as well as practical support which can make any move to emergency accommodation a little easier for the victim. Importantly, they are also able to advocate for the person they are supporting, in negotiating crisis accommodation e.g. to be offered accommodation close to family and social networks.

The main issue with the Crisis Assistance Service is not the value it has brought to individual victims of domestic violence, but that police are not referring cases to the Scheme

On average five or six cases are being referred to each Crisis Assistance Service each month. This is a small percentage of the number of domestic violence incidents attended by police in each LAC and the domestic violence incidents resulting in a charge. The low use of the Scheme has resulted in a cost per case of \$3,831.

A range of reasons have been identified for the lower than expected rate of referral to the Crisis Assistance Service

From the police perspective, the Crisis Assistance Service does not have a clearly defined role in relation to other domestic violence services. The service is seen to duplicate or overlap with other services. They therefore do not see the need, or the potential advantage, in the domestic violence victim being contacted by a support service at the time of the domestic violence incident as they are aware *all* people who have been involved in a domestic violence incident will be called by the LCP within a few hours to assess their need for support. The exception is where there is a need for crisis accommodation: indeed many General Duties Officers have formed the view that is the main purpose of the referral to the Crisis Assistance Service.

In one or two of the pilot locations, some tensions in the relationship between the police and the Crisis Assistance Service have also impacted referrals. Some police have questioned the skills and the roles of the Crisis Assistance Service workers attending the incident and/or the police station. Some police contend that the support worker has escalated matters by challenging police about the action they are taking or not taking in front of the victim, and 'speaking for the victim' rather than letting them speak for themselves. Such 'advocacy' actions are perceived as inappropriate, interfering and unhelpful by police officers some of whom are reportedly reluctant to make subsequent referrals to the service. This highlights the need to clarify the precise role of the worker attending the police station or incident, and also to ensure workers have the necessary skills, training and professional support to avoid being 'drawn into' the police procedures in an unhelpful way. Ongoing training of police in domestic violence is also vital to support understanding the dynamics and cycle of domestic violence, the benefits that can be obtained by providing support to victims at the time of the incident, drawing for instance on the research evidence regarding the reduction of trauma.

That in some LACs on some occasions, police have been frustrated by not being able to immediately reach the Crisis Assistance Support when they call, has undoubtedly been a factor in the low number of referrals.

The DVLOs provided evidence of extensive and ongoing Crisis Assistance Service information sessions they have undertaken internally (at least one in close partnership with the Crisis Assistance Service). The lack of referrals is not for 'want of trying'. Some police are now seriously questioning the return for the level of resources they are investing in trying to 'drive' the service.

Meanwhile Crisis Assistance Services have been disappointed by the level of referrals received from the police (although one service says it is probably running at close to full capacity). They struggle to explain the low uptake – other than the initiative not having been driven strongly enough by senior management in LACs and that General Duties Police Officers lack awareness of the additional advantages of talking to the victim at, or near the time of, the incident rather than several hours later.

Half of referrals to the Crisis Assistance Service have been in business hours and many do not involve face-to-face contact

This means that the usage pattern does not align with the key service gap it was designed to fill. The unique features of the Crisis Assistance service is that it was introduced to provide after hours, face-to-face support when needed. Only half (51%) of crisis referrals occurred after-hours and over a third of cases (36%) involved phone contact only.

The definition and scope of crisis support needs to be clarified

The definition and scope of crisis support is not sufficiently defined or understood. It is being applied differentially across the LACs and support services. 'Crisis support' in some cases can extend to five or more contacts or meetings with the client. There may be legitimate reasons for this – for instance, no other case management support can be found, or it takes time to find one. It may be that more time has been able to be invested in supporting individual clients – given the low number of referrals received. In the future, it would be important to consider the definition and scope of 'crisis assistance' to ensure a broadly consistent approach across locations

There is evidence that Crisis Assistance Service referrals increase with greater leadership, accountability and monitoring

The recent increase in the number of police referrals in one LAC has been attributed to the introduction of some new procedures. These included General Duties Officers being required to include in their 'narrative report' whether or not they offered the victim support (or made a crisis referral) and if not, why not. These responses were monitored by the Crime Manager and contact made with the General Duties Officers where necessary. General Duties Officers were also provided by DVLOs with cards with the Crisis Assistance Service contact details and information on the supports they provide, together with a flow chart to assist General Duties Officers understand when and in what circumstance they might call the service or seek their attendance – say at a police station or hospital. This action resulted in a considerable increase in the number of monthly referrals made since June 2017, from five or so a month, to over 20. This clearly indicates there is scope to further increase the number of referrals when a different approach is adopted within LACs.

There is a need to map the range of domestic violence crisis and support service to ascertain the specific role of the Crisis Assistance Service and its positioning in the sector

Three 24-hour domestic violence hotlines are available in NSW as well as a range of domestic violence support services across NSW in business hours (when half the referrals are being received by the Crisis Assistance Service). There are also additional domestic violence services operating in local communities. Clarifying the role of the Crisis Assistance Service in this service landscape, will assist with determining where and how it might be best positioned in the sector to maximise its effectiveness, and address some of the confusion that police (and community members) experience in understanding different domestic violence service roles and boundaries.

7.13. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The following options are presented for consideration

Issues	Options	Potential benefits
The Crisis Assistance Service was developed without a business case – the specific needs it aims to address should be clearly defined in the current policy service context	1) Map the full range of domestic violence support and crisis assistance services operating in NSW, identifying needs and any potential overlap in relation to the Crisis Assistance Service- particularly with Safer Pathway - to determine specific need the crisis service aims to address, and its key role and position within the existing domestic violence sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The need for, and specific role, of the Crisis Assistance Service and how it relates to other domestic violence services and support will be re-assessed and clearly defined
The Crisis Assistance Service lacks Program and Operational Guidelines which is leading to practice inconsistency and poor accountability	2) If the model continues to be funded, prepare comprehensive Program and Operational Guidelines. The guidelines should clearly define what is in and what is out of scope for the crisis support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhanced accountability ▪ Improved and more consistent practice in line with defined roles
The Crisis Assistance Service has lacked top down support and accountability by LAC senior management which has contributed to the low rate of police referrals	3) Engage Local Area Commanders in overseeing the police operations 4) Put in place mechanisms to increase accountability in each LAC for implementation and monitoring of the Crisis Assistance Service (e.g. including referrals in the COPS narrative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased referrals to the Crisis Assistance Service ▪ Improved monitoring and accountability
The direct cost per case of operating the Crisis Assistance Service is excessive at the current level of usage	5) Consider mechanisms to increase the rate of referral to reduce the per case cost 6) Consider setting a benchmark/target for the per case cost 7) Any future expansion of the Crisis Assistance Service should be subject to a full economic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced per case cost ▪ Increased value for money

Issues	Options	Potential benefits
The definition and scope of crisis assistance is open to interpretation leading to inconsistency in understandings and practice	8) Define the scope of crisis assistance - including expectations regarding ongoing contact with the client, the service-linking versus case management role, whether the role should encompass advocacy, and the specific role of crisis workers in relation to engaging with police officers investigating the incident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced potential for tensions between police and crisis service ▪ Increased efficiencies through focussed support
There is limited understanding amongst many police of the potential benefits to them and to the victim receiving crisis support in the immediate aftermath of the incident	9) Prepare a document that sets out the weight of research evidence regarding the range of benefits to victims that can occur by providing crisis assistance close to the time of the domestic violence incident (beyond the provision of emergency accommodation) 10) Gather case studies from those police officers who regularly refer victims to the crisis service to document and illustrate how the crisis assistance service has supported police and victims – real life stories may be more impactful than research evidence. Include together with evidence as the key rationale in Operational Guidelines and training programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased understanding of benefits leads to increased referrals
The Crisis Assistance Service pilot was rolled out without a formal training program targeting General Duties Officers who attend domestic violence incidents - resulting in low level of awareness and understanding and inefficiencies due to the onus on DVLOs in particular to continuously inform/educate police about the service	11) If the model continues to be funded, develop a joint training package for police and support service: this should involve consultation with both police, NGOs and ideally clients 12) Consider joint training sessions involving both partners (police and the NGOs) to strengthen the relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased police awareness of the Crisis Assistance Service and the range of circumstances in which a referral may be appropriate

Issues	Options	Potential benefits
Communication between LACs and the Crisis Assistance Services has been highly variable across pilot areas, and in some cases was extremely limited	<p>13) Convene a cross- location Working Group of police, NGOs and the funding body to meet, say on a quarterly basis, to report on progress and share information and learnings</p> <p>14) Require police and NGOs to prepare a joint report in each LAC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved communication between partners Greater engagement by police Increased efficiency and momentum for success
The Crisis Assistance Service is a stand-alone service and does not need to be linked to the DVDS	15) Consider where the Crisis Assistance Service offering best sits in the service system in order to maximise leverage, minimise duplication, increase administrative efficiency, and build on existing strong relationships with police wherever possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More integration with the domestic violence service system Less confusion for police and clients
Considerable experience and skills are required to work as a crisis domestic violence worker: quality of the service, worker well-being, and police confidence are at risk if crisis staff are not sufficiently equipped to do this difficult work in a calm and professional manner	<p>16) Set minimum standards/qualifications for staff employed as crisis workers, including qualifications in trauma-based practice</p> <p>17) Provide appropriate orientation, training and ongoing professional development and support to crisis workers to support quality service and safe work practices - consider using external supervisors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved quality of support Police have more confidence in the service
Sporadic difficulties in police being able to directly and quickly contact the crisis worker at the time they need to speak to them has resulted in some police not referring to the service	18) In any roll out of the service, appropriate mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that contact between the police referrer and the crisis support worker on duty is smooth, quick and efficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in barriers to police referrals

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APPENDIX A DISCUSSION GUIDES



EVALUATION OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE SCHEME OUTCOMES DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR POLICE

My name is XXX and I work for the social research consulting firm Urbis. As you are aware, Urbis has been engaged by Women NSW to evaluate the process and impacts of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) and to get feedback on the crisis assistance service. The primary focus of this second stage of the evaluation is outcomes and achievements to date, what has been learned about the promotion of the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service and their efficient implementation, the effectiveness of the program model and guidelines, and the impacts on participants, police and the service system. It will also identify critical success factors and the issues that will need to be taken into account and addressed in any State-wide roll out of the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service, to maximise take-up and effectiveness.

Consultations for the evaluation are confidential. No comments will be attributed (or identifiable) to any individual or organisation in other discussions or in reports, except with express permission.

I have a series of questions to ask you - you may not be able to answer them all - that is fine - we know everyone we speak to will have a different level of engagement with the services.

Have you any questions to ask before we start?

I would like to confirm that you consent to this interview being recorded.

DVDS

Impacts and outcomes for the primary person and third party

- Can you please remind me of your role in relation to the DVDS pilot?
- What is the main reason people are accessing the DVDS? What are the main sources of referral?
- What has been the response of applicants and third parties to the DVDS?
- What aspects of the DVDS are working well? Which are proving more challenging? How might these challenges be addressed?

Impacts on the Police and service sector

- What impacts (positive or negative) has the DVDS pilot had on NSW Police, NGOs, the court system, the broader service system?
- What efficiencies (if any) might be put in place?
- What if any information, training or other supports might be needed to ensure Police are able to effectively support the operation of the DVDS?

Model strengths and limitations

- How successful is the DVDS model/approach in meeting the program objectives?
- How effective/appropriate is the disclosure threshold for ensuring the safety of the applicants?
Can you recommend any changes?
- Which aspects of the DVDS are appropriate, effective and/or efficient and should be retained?
(Evidence/rationale)
- What, if any, aspects of the DVDS are inappropriate, ineffective and/or inefficient? Why?
(Evidence/rationale)
- How could DVDS be amended, enhanced or strengthened to better meet the program objectives?
- What policy, legislative, service-delivery or implementation issues would need to be considered and why?

Lessons learned for any wider roll-out of the DVDS

- What were the key challenges in the initial implementation phase and how were these addressed over time?
- What lessons have been learned about early implementation phase that will assist with a smoother implementation in any State-wide roll-out?
- How do regional/contextual factors inhibit or enhance the implementation of the DVDS?
- How is the DVDS most effectively promoted to the community?
- What has been learned about effective ways of engaging effectively with diverse populations?
- What governance, management, coordination, training and supervision mechanisms best support the DVDS?
- What are the critical success factors for effective implementation, and what implications does this have for the roll-out of the DVDS to other regions?
- Are there any other comments that you would like to make?

CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

Impacts and outcomes for service users

- Can you please remind me of your role in relation to the Crisis Assistance Service?
- What aspects of the Crisis Assistance Service are working well? Which are proving more challenging? How might these challenges be addressed?
- To what extent are police involving the Crisis Assistance Service in appropriate call-outs?



Impacts on the Police and service sector

- What impacts (positive or negative) has the Crisis Assistance Service had on NSW Police, NGOs, or the broader service system (particularly any other crisis services)?
- What efficiencies (if any) might be put in place?
- What if any information, training or other supports might be needed to ensure Police are able to effectively support the operation of the Crisis Assistance Service?

Model strengths and limitations

- How successful is the Crisis Assistance Service in meeting the program objectives?
- Which aspects of the Crisis Assistance Service are appropriate, effective and/or efficient and should be retained? (Evidence/rationale)
- What, if any, aspects of the Crisis Assistance Service are inappropriate, ineffective and/or inefficient? Why? (Evidence/rationale)
- How could the Crisis Assistance Service be amended, enhanced or strengthened to better meet the program objectives?
- What policy, legislative, service-delivery or implementation issues would need to be considered and why?

Lessons learned for any wider roll-out of the crisis assistance service

- What were the key challenges in the initial implementation phase and how were these addressed over time?
- What lessons have been learned about early implementation phase that will assist with a smoother implementation in any State-wide roll-out?
- How do regional/contextual factors inhibit or enhance the implementation of the Crisis Assistance Service?
- How is the Crisis Assistance Service most effectively promoted to police?
- What has been learned about effective ways of engaging effectively with diverse populations?
- What governance, management, coordination, training and supervision mechanisms best support the Crisis Assistance Service?
- What are the critical success factors for effective implementation, and what implications does this have for the roll-out of the Crisis Assistance Service to other regions?
- Are there any other comments that you would like to make?

Thank you for your participation



EVALUATION OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE SCHEME OUTCOMES DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR NGO STAFF AND MANAGEMENT

My name is XXX and I work for the social research consulting firm Urbis. As you are aware, Urbis has been engaged by Women NSW to evaluate the process and impacts of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) and to get feedback on the Crisis Assistance Service. The primary focus of this second stage of the evaluation is outcomes and achievements to date, what has been learned about the promotion of the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service and their efficient implementation, the effectiveness of the program model and guidelines, and the impacts on participants, police and the service system. It will also identify critical success factors and the issues that will need to be taken into account and addressed in any State-wide roll out of the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service, to maximise take-up and effectiveness.

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I have a series of questions to ask you - you may not be able to answer them all - that is fine - we know everyone we speak to will have a different level of engagement with the services.

Have you any questions to ask before we start?

I would like to confirm that you consent to this interview being recorded.

DVDS

Impacts and outcomes for the primary person and third party

- What is your role in relation to the DVDS?
- What is the main reason people are accessing the DVDS? What are the main sources of referral?
- How are people using the information that they receive, and what impact does this have on them?
- Do people using the system feel safe, or safer than before? On what basis do they feel safe? What other impacts are being observed?
- What actions, if any, do people take as a result of obtaining information/not obtaining information about prior offending? How has it impacted on their decision-making? Can you provide some examples?
- Has being involved in the DVDS impacted on people's willingness to report violence to the police?
- How satisfied were people utilising the DVDS with the process and the outcome – including the police roll?
- How satisfied were people utilising the DVDS with the support they received through the process? What was most helpful? Were there any gaps in the support provided?
- How many people chose to have the DVDS support provided by the service provider?
- What were the main reasons for using/not using the support?

Impacts on the service sector

- What impacts (positive or negative) has the DVDS had on NSW Police, NGOs, the court system, the broader service system?
- What are the costs of operating the DVDS (direct/indirect)?
- What efficiencies, if any, might be put in place?

Model strengths and limitations

- How successful is the DVDS in meeting the program objectives?
- How effective/appropriate is the disclosure threshold for ensuring the safety of the applicants? Can you recommend any changes?
- Which aspects of the DVDS are appropriate, effective and/or efficient and should be retained? (Evidence/rationale)
- What, if any, aspects of the DVDS are inappropriate, ineffective and/or inefficient? Why? (Evidence/rationale)
- How could the DVDS be amended, enhanced or strengthened to better meet the program objectives?
- What policy, legislative, service-delivery or implementation issues need to be considered and why?

Lessons learned for any wider roll-out of the DVDS

- What were the key challenges in the initial implementation phase and how were these addressed over time?
- How do regional/contextual factors inhibit or enhance the implementation of the DVDS?
- How is the DVDS most effectively promoted to the community?
- What has been learned about effective ways of engaging effectively with diverse populations?
- What governance, management, coordination, training and supervision mechanisms best support the DVDS?
- What are the critical success factors for effective implementation, and what implications does this have for the roll out to other regions?
- Are there any other comments you would like to make?

CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

Impacts and outcomes for the service users

- What is your role in relation to the Crisis Assistance Service?
- What is the main reason people are accessing the Crisis Assistance Service?
- Do people using the crisis service assistance feel safe, or safer than before? On what basis do they feel safe? What other impacts are being observed?
- Has being involved in the crisis service assistance impacted on people's willingness to report violence to the police?
- How satisfied were people utilising the Crisis Assistance Service with the process and the outcome?
- How satisfied were people utilising the Crisis Assistance Service with the support they received through the process? What was most helpful? Were there any gaps in the support provided?

Impacts on the service sector

- What impacts (positive or negative) have the Crisis Assistance Service had on NSW Police, NGOs, and the broader service system (particularly other crisis services)?
- What are the costs of operating the Crisis Assistance Service (direct/indirect)?
- What efficiencies, if any, might be put in place?

Model strengths and limitations

- How successful is the Crisis Assistance Service in meeting the program objectives?
- Which aspects of the Crisis Assistance Service are appropriate, effective and/or efficient and should be retained? (Evidence/rationale)
- What, if any, aspects of the Crisis Assistance Service are inappropriate, ineffective and/or inefficient? Why? (Evidence/rationale)
- How could the Crisis Assistance Service be amended, enhanced or strengthened to better meet the program objectives?
- What policy, legislative, service-delivery or implementation issues need to be considered and why?

Lessons learned for any wider roll-out the Crisis Assistance Service

- What were the key challenges in the initial implementation phase and how were these addressed over time?
- How do regional/contextual factors inhibit or enhance the implementation of the Crisis Assistance Service?



- How is the Crisis Assistance Service most effectively promoted to police?
- What has been learned about effective ways of engaging effectively with diverse populations?
- What governance, management, coordination, training and supervision mechanisms best support the Crisis Assistance Service?
- What are the critical success factors for effective implementation, and what implications does this have for the roll-out to other regions?
- Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Thank you for your participation



EVALUATION OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE SCHEME OUTCOMES DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

My name is XXX and I work for the social research consulting firm Urbis. As you are aware, Urbis has been engaged by Women NSW to evaluate the process and impacts of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) and to get feedback on the Crisis Assistance Service. The primary focus of this second stage of the evaluation is outcomes and achievements to date, what has been learned about the promotion of the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service and their efficient implementation, the effectiveness of the program model and guidelines, and the impacts on participants, police and the service system. It will also identify critical success factors and the issues that will need to be taken into account and addressed in any State-wide roll out of the DVDS and the Crisis Assistance Service, to maximise take-up and effectiveness.

Consultations for the evaluation are confidential. No comments will be attributed (or identifiable) to any individual or organisation in other discussions or in reports, except with express permission.

I have a series of questions to ask you - you may not be able to answer them all - that is fine - we know everyone we speak to will have a different level of engagement with the services.

Have you any questions to ask before we start?

I would like to confirm that you consent to this interview being recorded.

DVDS

Impacts and outcomes for the primary person and third party

- What knowledge of or contact do you have with the DVDS?
- To your knowledge, what are the main reasons people are accessing the DVDS? What are the main sources of referral?
- How are people using any information that they receive, and what impact does this have on them?
- Do people using the DVDS feel safe, or safer, than before? What other impacts has the DVDS had on them?
- What actions, if any, do people take as a result of obtaining information/not obtaining information about prior offending? How has it impacted on decision-making?
- Has being involved in the DVDS impacted on people's willingness to report violence to the police?
- How satisfied were people utilising the DVDS with the process and the outcome?
- How satisfied were people utilising the DVDS with the support they received through the process? What was most helpful? Were there any gaps in the support provided?
- How many people chose to have the support provided by the service provider?
- What were the main reasons for using/not using the support?



Impacts on the service sector

- What impacts (positive or negative) have the DVDS service had on NSW Police, NGOs, the court system, the broader service system?

Model strengths and limitations

- How successful is the DVDS in meeting the program objectives?
- How effective/appropriate is the disclosure threshold for ensuring the safety of the applicants? Can you recommend any changes?
- Which aspects of the DVDS are appropriate, effective and/or efficient and should be retained? (Evidence/rationale)
- What, if any, aspects of the DVDS are inappropriate, ineffective and/or inefficient? Why? (Evidence/rationale)
- How could the DVDS be amended, enhanced or strengthened to better meet the program objectives?
- What policy, legislative, service-delivery or implementation issues would need to be considered and why?

Lessons learned for any wider roll-out of the DVDS

- What were the key challenges in the initial implementation phase and how were these addressed over time?
- How do regional/contextual factors inhibit or enhance the implementation of the DVDS?
- How is the DVDS most effectively promoted to the community?
- What has been learned about effective ways of engaging effectively with diverse populations?
- What governance, management, coordination, training and supervision mechanisms best support the DVDS?
- What are the critical success factors for effective implementation, and what implications does this have for replication and roll out in other regions?

CRISIS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

Impacts and outcomes for service users

- What knowledge of or contact do you have with the Crisis Assistance Service or the people it supports?
- What is your overall view about the Crisis Assistance Service model – eg is it meeting a gap in the sector? Is it playing a unique role - if so how?
- What do you think has been most successful? Is there anything that has been less successful? How might this be addressed?



Impacts on the service sector

- What impacts (positive or negative) has the Crisis Assistance Service had on NSW Police, NGOs,, and the broader service system (particularly other crisis services)?

Model strengths and limitations

- How successful is the Crisis Assistance Service in meeting the program objectives?
- Which aspects of the Crisis Assistance Service are appropriate, effective and/or efficient and should be retained? (Evidence/rationale)
- What, if any, aspects of the Crisis Assistance Service are inappropriate, ineffective and/or inefficient? Why? (Evidence/rationale)
- How could the Crisis Assistance Service be amended, enhanced or strengthened to better meet the program objectives?
- What policy, legislative, service-delivery or implementation issues would need to be considered and why?

Lessons learned for any wider roll-out of the Crisis Assistance Service

- What were the key challenges in the initial implementation phase and how were these addressed over time?
- How do regional/contextual factors inhibit or enhance the implementation of the Crisis Assistance Service?
- How is the Crisis Assistance Service most effectively promoted to police?
- What has been learned about effective ways of engaging effectively with diverse populations?
- What governance, management, coordination, training and supervision mechanisms best support the Crisis Assistance Service?
- What are the critical success factors for effective implementation, and what implications does this have for replication and roll-out in other regions?

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEETS AND MATERIALS



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE SCHEME EVALUATION

INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT OVERVIEW AND SAFETY PROTOCOL

Urbis has been commissioned by Women NSW to undertake an evaluation of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS). The evaluation will include recruiting and undertaking interviews with applicants and third parties who lodged an application on behalf of someone else. It will also include interviewing people who are eligible to make an application to the DVDS but have not done so but have availed themselves of the crisis assistance service.

These interviews are integral to the evaluation as they will help us understand the reasons why and how people access the DVDS, how they experience the application process, how they use any disclosed information, the impacts and outcomes of the disclosure or non-disclosure, and any suggestions for how the scheme might be improved. It will also enable us to explore the intersection between the DVDS and crisis assistance component of the service and obtain feedback on crisis assistance.

Due to the risks inherent in consulting with people who may be at risk of domestic violence, Urbis has received ethics approval from Bellberry Ltd to undertake interviews with DVDS applicants and users of the crisis service. The information below provides an overview of the recruitment and interview process that has been designed to ensure the safety and comfort of participants.

Who do we want to interview?

We want to speak with three different groups as part of the evaluation: DVDS applicants, third parties who lodged an application on behalf of someone else, and people who have used crisis assistance service but not the DVDS.

We are planning to conduct 30-minute interviews (either over the phone or face to face) with applicants or third parties who have submitted an application under the DVDS. These interviews will cover how they came to find out about the scheme, why they made an application, their satisfaction with the process, and the impact and outcomes of disclosure and non-disclosure. Some of these applicants may have used crisis assistance and their experience of this will also be explored.

We will also be undertaking 30-minute interviews (either over the phone or face to face) with people who have used crisis assistance but not the DVDS at each pilot site. These include people who may have elected not to use, or may not be aware, of the scheme. We are interested in their knowledge and perception of the DVDS, any concerns or barriers to accessing the scheme, their views on potential impacts of benefits and how the scheme might be better promoted or marketed. Their experience and level of satisfaction with crisis assistance will also be explored in-depth.

When will this be happening?

We are planning on conducting interviews with applicants and third parties between May and October 2017. Interviews with crisis assistance users will be conducted in September and October 2017.

What do we need you to do?

Recruitment of DVDS applicants

As a support worker who has contact with the applicant, you are in the best position to know their individual circumstances and to assess when and whether it is appropriate to invite them to participate in a phone interview for the evaluation. The safety of the applicant is paramount at all stages of process outlined below.



The following applicants should be invited to take part in the evaluation unless you believe that inviting them to take part in the evaluation would put their safety at risk and/or cause distress at a time when they are emotionally or otherwise very fragile:

- all applicants who make an application to the DVDS between June and October 2017
- all applicants who made an application before June 2017 who are still in contact with the support service as at the start of the fieldwork period.

As mentioned above, the decision on the best time to inform applicants about the evaluation and invite their participation should be made with reference to the agreed safety protocols and your professional judgement. We are keen to talk to applicants towards the end of or after their contact with the DVDS in order to assess their full experience of the scheme. From the point of initial contact, we understand that this will range from two weeks to several months or longer.

Recruitment of people who have used crisis assistance but not the DVDS

We plan to conduct interviews with a small number of people who have used crisis assistance. These interviews will focus on their experience with crisis assistance, any perceptions of the DVDS, reasons for not using the DVDS if they had been given the option, and any ideas as to how the services could be improved or better promoted. Urbis will work with you to identify the best methods for identifying individuals in the target group and inviting a sample to participate in the evaluation using a random method of selection to avoid selection bias. The process for inviting crisis assistance users is detailed below.



What information will we collect and how will we use it?

All interviews with applicants will be conducted by skilled Urbis researchers with experience in interviewing vulnerable participants. The interviews will be guided by a discussion guide that will focus on the applicant's experience of the DVDS, their reason for using it, the impact that the disclosure (or non-disclosure) has had on them, how the process has impacted their plans or decision-making, whether they would recommend the scheme to others, and any ideas they have on how the scheme could be improved. Interviews will also explore intersection issues relating to the DVDS the support and crisis assistance service.

The interviews with crisis assistance users will explore their experiences with crisis assistance, their level of satisfaction with the service, the extent to which it has been helpful, and how it might be improved. The interviews will also explore their knowledge and perceptions of the DVDS, any barriers or reasons for not using the scheme and ideas for how it could be promoted.

If the participant agrees, the interviews will be audio recorded for Urbis internal analysis purposes only. Any recordings or interview notes will be kept secure within Urbis' secure offices and password-protected digital document storage.

All the information gathered in the interviews will be included in Urbis' analysis and evaluation of the DVDS and intersection with the crisis service. Our evaluation also includes, analysis of program data, interviews with pilot site and other stakeholders, and a cost analysis. The final report to Women NSW will consider:

- implementation of the DVDS
- level of demand
- profile and outcomes for applicants
- impacts and outcomes for applicants and the wider service sector
- strengths and limitations of the scheme
- intersections, and satisfaction, with the crisis service
- lessons learnt from the pilot of the DVDS and the crisis service.

No individual will be identified as taking part in the evaluation.

The Urbis team

If you have any questions regarding the evaluation please feel free to contact any of the Urbis team.



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02 8233 9954

SAFETY PROTOCOLS

- The safety of all evaluation participants is paramount. If contact, the provision of written material or their participation in the evaluation is likely to place the participant's or their family at any risk, they should not be considered for the evaluation.
- It is important that participants know that their participation in the evaluation is entirely voluntary and if they choose not to take part, they will still be able to access your services, and any other support they require.
- Participants can select how they wish Urbis to contact them. This may include nominating a support person or service as their first contact point.
- Participants can withdraw their consent at any time, without having to provide any reason. They can do this by contacting you, or contacting Urbis directly.
- If the participant wishes, they can have a support person with them when they undertake the interview.
- If, once a person has signed a Consent Form, their situation changes and you no longer feel it is safe or appropriate for them to take part in the evaluation you should inform Christina Griffiths from Urbis immediately at chgriffiths@urbis.com.au or 02 8233 9954.
- When providing information regarding the evaluation, it should be clear that participation is entirely voluntary.

SCRIPT FOR APPROACHING APPLICANTS

The following provides an example of how you may wish to explain the evaluation to applicants.

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme is a new service. Women NSW has asked a research company, Urbis to evaluate it. As part of the evaluation Urbis is wanting to do a 30 minute phone interview with people who have made an application under the scheme.

These interviews are really important. Your feedback will help the researchers find out why people are accessing the scheme, how the disclosure process is working and what people are doing with the information they find out.

The interviewer will ask questions about why you made an application, how you found the process, how you used any information you were given and any ideas that you might have about how to improve the scheme.

Taking part in an interview is entirely voluntary and you can have a support person in the interview if you like. If you choose to take part, you will receive a \$50 gift card to thank you for your time.

Urbis has produced some information on the evaluation and the interviews. This also includes a form for you to fill out if you are interested in taking part. If you are interested, you can give the completed form to me and I will pass it onto Urbis.

An Urbis researcher will then contact you to arrange a time for the interview. If lots of people are interested in doing an interview, they might not be able to talk with everyone.

Everything that you say in the interview will be confidential and you don't need to answer any questions that you don't want to.

SCRIPT FOR APPROACHING PEOPLE WHO HAVE USED CRISIS ASSISTANCE BUT NOT THE DVDS

The following provides an example of how you may wish to explain the interviews with crisis assistance users who have not used the DVDS.

The NSW government is currently trialling a new domestic violence service that helps people who may be at risk of domestic violence to find out if their current or former partner has a history of violent criminal offences. It's called the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. The scheme is currently being evaluated to see how it is working and provide some recommendations on how it could be improved. The independent company doing the evaluation (Urbis) would like to speak with people who could use the service but haven't.

They are also very keen to get feedback from you on your experience with crisis assistance. How helpful was the support? How satisfied are you with the quality and timeliness of the support you received? What difference has the support made to your life? How could the service be improved?

Taking part in an interview is entirely voluntary and if you choose to take part, you will receive \$50 gift card to thank you for your time.

The research company doing the evaluation, Urbis, have produced some information on the evaluation and the interviews. This also includes a form for you to fill out if you are interested in taking part. If you are interested, you can give the completed form to me and I will pass it onto Urbis.

Urbis will contact you to arrange a suitable time for the interview. If lots of people are interested in taking part, they might not be able to interview everyone.

Consent Form

If you wish to take part in an interview as part of the evaluation, please complete this form and provide it to your support worker.

I, _____ (print name)
have read (or had read to me) and understood the information provided in this form.

I agree to participate in an interview as part of the evaluation of the DVDS and my experience with the support service (if I have used it).

I understand that this interview is voluntary and confidential, and that I can withdraw my permission at any time.

I know that the things I say may be included in the final report, but understand that I will not be named in the report and no-one will be able to find out what I said once the interview is over.

I understand that I may change my mind and decide not to take part at any time, and if I do then Urbis will remove my words from the report.

Signature: _____

Date: _____ / _____ / _____

I would like Urbis to contact me by:

☐ Phone ☐ Text message ☐ Email

☐ Other (please specify)

Please provide your preferred contact details

Please turn over...

About Urbis

Urbis is an independent research company which provides research services to governments and the community sector. We have been doing this for over 30 years, and have a lot of experience in working with different groups and communities across Australia.

Our team treat the people we interview with respect and care. We always seek to work in ways which make sure that people feel comfortable and safe to talk to us.

Our team



Alison Wallace
Director



Poppy Wise
Director



Lucy Barkl
Consultant



Christina Griffiths
Consultant

For more information

For more information about any aspect of this evaluation, please contact Christina Griffiths at Urbis on 1800 244 863 or chgriffiths@urbis.com.au.

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE NSW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE SCHEME



Women NSW has commissioned Urbis, an independent research company, to evaluate the NSW Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS).

As one of the first people to use the DVDS, your views are really important. Your experience and feedback can help shape how the scheme will be run in the future. To thank you for your assistance with the evaluation, Urbis will send you a \$50 Coles gift card.

We would like to speak with people who have made an application for disclosure to talk about their experience of the scheme, how they used any information that was provided and the type of support that they received around the disclosure.

Your involvement in the evaluation is entirely voluntary. If at any time you no longer feel comfortable or safe to take part, you can let your support service or Urbis know and they will not contact you again about the evaluation. Your choice to take part in the evaluation, or not, will have no impact on your access to any services you currently use.

The interview process

If you are interested in taking part in an interview, fill out the Consent Form and give it to your support worker.

They will then pass the form onto Urbis and a researcher will contact you to arrange a suitable time for a phone interview. The interview will take up to 30 minutes, depending on how much you have to say. You can have a support person with you if you would like.

What we will ask you about

During the interview, we will ask you questions about:

- how you found out about the scheme
- why you made an application
- how you found the disclosure process
- how you used any information you were given
- whether you would recommend the scheme to others
- whether you received any help from the support or crisis assistance and how useful this was.

You don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to and all your answers will be kept confidential.

The evaluation

The information you give will help us find out how the new scheme and the support service and crisis assistance is working, if they are helping people and to let the NSW Government know how they could be improved.

We will use the information we gather to provide a report back to the government.

What will happen to your information?

We will not tell anyone you have participated in this research and once we have completed the interview, we will not contact you again. Any details you provide will be stored securely and only the Urbis researchers working on the evaluation will be able to access them.

You can contact Urbis if you decide after the interview that you would like to access the personal information you have provided to us, or you no longer want to take part in the research.

Urbis respects your privacy. Our Privacy Policy is available at urbis.com.au/privacy.

Consent form cont...

Please circle the best times for Urbis to contact you

am			pm						
9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6 7

Please select the best day for Urbis to contact you

<input type="checkbox"/>	Monday
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tuesday
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wednesday
<input type="checkbox"/>	Thursday
<input type="checkbox"/>	Friday
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't have a preference

Please provide this form to your support worker.

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