

It Stops Here:

Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform

**Domestic Violence NSW submission to the
NSW Government Blueprint for domestic and
family violence responses in NSW**



About Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW)

Domestic Violence NSW Inc. is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW. DVNSW provides a representative and advocacy function for specialist services and the women, families and communities they support.

DVNSW's mission is to eliminate domestic and family violence through leadership in policy, advocacy, partnerships and the promotion of best practice. We work with our members, state and federal government and communities to create a safer NSW for all.

DVNSW member services represent the diversity of specialist services working in NSW to support women, families and communities impacted by domestic and family violence including:

- Crisis and refuge services
- Transitional accommodation and community housing providers
- Family support services
- Neighbourhood centres and drop in centres
- Specialist homelessness service providers
- Men's behaviour change programs and networks
- Community organisations working with high risk communities
- Specialist women's legal support services
- Women and children's support services
- Safe at Home programs

DVNSW members are all non-government organisations, some entirely government funded, others supported through philanthropic donations or partnerships with industry or the corporate sector. Many of our members have multiple government and non-government funding streams. DVNSW advocates for best practice, continuous system improvements and innovative policy responses to domestic and family violence including building workforce capacity and representation at all levels of government. We provide policy advice to multiple departments in the NSW Government on prevention and response. We work with communities and the media to increase awareness and represent the sector on a number of state and federal advisory bodies including the NSW Premier's Council on Homelessness, the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Council, the NSW Early Intervention Council, the NSW Reference Group for Men's Behaviour Change, the ANROWS Practitioner Engagement Group, AWAVA. We co-convene and provide a secretariat function for the NSW Women's Alliance with Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia.

We acknowledge the work and practice wisdom of specialist women's services and domestic and family violence practitioners in the sector that underpin the recommendations in this submission. DVNSW thanks the specialist services that have developed best practice over decades of working with women and children and shared their expertise with us to make a submission to the Blueprint. We also pay tribute to those who have experienced domestic or family violence and to our advocates, colleagues and partners in government and non-government agencies.

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List of DVNSW's recommendations to the NSW Government Blueprint consultation

Recommendations for Prevention:

1. That the NSW Government officially endorse Our Watch's *Shared Framework for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and their Children in Australia* and prioritise an ongoing funding allocation in the state budget for Our Watch and the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) for the lifespan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*.
2. NSW Government and NGOs to collaboratively develop shared understandings and principles recognising that domestic and family violence is primarily a gendered crime which violates human rights to assist communities, governments and services to design and improve local service responses and drive long-term community based prevention initiatives.
3. That the NSW Government work with the specialist sector and local communities to co-design and adopt a coordinated, 20 year NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Plan including specific strategies, commitments and the resources necessary to respond to gender inequality and violence in the diversity of communities affected by sexual assault and domestic and family violence.
4. That the NSW Premier, alongside political and community leaders, demonstrate leadership and commitment by filming messages and public campaigns unequivocally condemning violence against women and families and continuing to make clear public statements that domestic violence is serious, a crime, a violation of human rights and will not be tolerated in NSW.
5. The NSW Premier and other Ministers to continue to publically acknowledge the NSW Government's respect for NGO's expertise in specialised service provision and to ensure that specialist service expertise is valued, resourced and nurtured.
6. That the NSW Government explore opportunities to promote gender equity and domestic and family violence prevention throughout all government departments, programs, policies and reform processes.

7. NSW Government to prioritise the development of whole of school prevention approaches in NSW across the three school sectors based on best practice developed in other jurisdictions, with particular reference to Victoria's Respectful Relationships in Schools model¹ and Our Watch's *Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and their Children in Australia* using the expertise of the NSW youth and domestic and family violence sectors.
8. Government and community taskforces with diverse representation to co-design specific approaches to prevention, early intervention and best practice responses for high-risk populations including Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ communities and people with disability.
9. Implementation of a NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy with a priority given to exploring the work undertaken in Aboriginal communities in relation to perpetration of violence. The Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy would intersect with a strong, well-resourced Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Network to develop consistent and evidence-based best practice initiatives to supporting Aboriginal women, families, men and communities impacted by violence and trauma.
10. A NSW Aboriginal Women's Advisory Group with members having expertise in sexual assault and DFV should be established and meet regularly with relevant Ministers and Departmental Secretaries to ensure Aboriginal people have ongoing opportunities to contribute to the development and implementation of the NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy and any other strategies or policies relating to the women of NSW. Regional networks within Aboriginal communities also need to be established and resourced to ensure ongoing conversations about sexual assault and DFV which will feed through to the NSW Aboriginal Advisory Group.
11. That the NSW Government support and resource People With Disability Australia and Domestic Violence NSW to lead cross-sector development through the implementation of *Women with Disability and Domestic and Family Violence: A Guide for Policy and Practice*, to ensure that all domestic and family violence services are accessible for women with disability.

Recommendations for Early Intervention:

12. Consistent standards and pathways for domestic and family violence risk assessment, referral and management should be implemented and supported by a well resourced integrated DFV system that has specialist and mainstream services working with mutual respect.

¹ [http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-\(1\)/Respectful-Relationships-Education-in-Schools-\(Vic](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-(1)/Respectful-Relationships-Education-in-Schools-(Vic)

13. That an NGO domestic and family violence specialist regional coordinator position be established in each FaCS/Health district and resourced to grow and maintain connections between specialist and mainstream NGOs, government agencies and communities including regular mapping of the service system and gaps, identifying local emerging issues and supporting best practice responses to domestic and family violence.
14. Government and domestic and family violence specialists to co-design strategies, tools and training around early identification of domestic and family violence, identification of the primary victim and primary aggressor, using best practice to identify and manage ongoing risk to women and their children as well as the perpetrator.
15. That a taskforce with specialist legal experts, advocates and support services be set up to explore the experiences of families impacted by domestic and family violence in the Family Court, Child Protection and legal and criminal justice systems in NSW with the purpose of improving responses to survivors of violence.
16. An investment in appropriate workforce development on the impacts of domestic and family violence and complex trauma for frontline staff and management across all government departments but specifically in the child protection and justice systems.
17. That the NSW Parliament make a long term, bipartisan government commitment and strategy to ensure a range of safe and affordable housing and support options are accessible to women and families impacted by domestic violence (as well as perpetrators of violence) including expansion of Staying Home Leaving Violence services, dedicated specialist DFV crisis accommodation, transitional, social and community housing and diverse private rental accommodation models and subsidies.
18. That a working group be established to explore flexible models for access to brokerage, support periods, outreach and counselling in a range of specialist service environments (SHS, SHLV, refuge and crisis accommodation, outreach etc).
19. NSW Government should explore the success of established programs such as Breathing Space in Western Australia and consider options for short and medium term removal of perpetrators with wraparound behaviour change programs, trauma specialists and access to drug and alcohol programs in specialist perpetrator residential services.

20. That models for common assessment and outcome measurement be explored using peak and sector expertise with a focus on local models of service and integrated reform to ensure consistency in family safety across departmental reform processes.
21. That ARACY's principles for strengths-based practice, shared values and common approaches to risk assessment and early intervention working with families to build their capacity be embedded in domestic and family violence and early intervention systems.
22. That the NSW Government undertake a review of the competitive tendering process for human services that examines best practice models in other jurisdictions, particularly those that facilitate co-design, collaboration and joint tendering, and includes consultation with NGO service providers.

Recommendations for an integrated service system supporting safety and recovery:

23. A sustainable, well-resourced sector.
24. Safe, and affordable accommodation options.
25. A valued and well developed workforce.
26. Client-centred, intensive, trauma-specialist service delivery with multiple supports wrapped around individuals to provide support and safety when DFV is identified.
27. Accessible services

Recommendations for work with perpetrators:

28. Minimum standards for all practitioners working in behaviour change should be urgently developed in collaboration with key MBC network service providers, NGOs and professional bodies to ensure that perpetrators of violence can access or be referred to quality interventions that are consistent, local and grounded in the most recent evidence. Resource the NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network to develop future work, standards and models of practice in line with research and practice identified through ANROWS and No To Violence including establishment of common, shared mechanisms to track and evaluate best practice approaches to all work with offenders and families by government and non-government agencies.

29. Each FaCS/Local Health District to appoint a key NGO contact to oversee Men's Behaviour Change work and progress in the area. This contact would monitor and oversee behaviour change responses/programs in the area, support practitioners working in the field and collaborate with relevant services and agencies (such as the police, local specialist domestic violence services, community corrections, health services and Safer Pathways sites) to ensure appropriate referrals take place and interventions are accessible.
30. Invest in specialist workers from the DFV sector to work in, and with, Community Corrections and non-governmental Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) interventions to ensure consistent approaches across government and non-government programs. Structures to be formalised to nurture existing and new relationship networks between Community Corrections offender work and NGO MBC sectors.
31. All NGO and Community Corrections programs and practitioners to comply with NSW MBC Program Minimum Standards. Ensure there are regular reviews of these standards including accreditation and regular auditing of programs. NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network to be resourced to play a key role in this work.
32. Invest in specialist training for existing behaviour change practitioners, as well as for teachers, youth workers, juvenile justice workers and police. Police training is to include promotion of the Men's Referral Service and referral to local MBC Programs when responding to incidents of DFV.
33. All male perpetrators of violence should be automatically referred to the Men's Referral Service (MRS) for assessment and support. Safety Action Meetings should refer perpetrators to the MRS and wherever available a local MBC Program or intervention that meets the minimum standards.
34. NSW Government to resource specialist domestic and family violence services and Men's Behaviour Change specialists to create service support structures for families and partners.
35. Form an expert panel of government, community and non-government specialist stakeholders with an interest in developing perpetrator interventions that promote a consistent approach to work with offenders, ongoing consideration of best practice and developments in evidence and research.
36. All ADVO offenders to be assessed and referred to a local behaviour change program or practitioner that meets the minimum standards.

37. Engage courts more consistently with MBCPs, including establishing a process so that consistent referrals from courts to a local MBCP occur that meets the minimum standards, and employ specialist workers in courts who can engage men interacting with the justice system early or at key points – similar to the women’s domestic violence court advocacy system model.
38. Partner support work to be recognised as a key element of specialist DFV service delivery and for resources to be allocated to women and children’s services to develop this work.

Recommendations to develop and support a sustainable, robust domestic and family violence system:

39. That the role and specialist expertise of peak bodies for the domestic and family violence system in NSW be recognised and valued by including peak representatives at all levels of government reform including strategic long term planning for prevention, early intervention and responses. That peaks representing children, family, health, women, young people and high risk populations be recurrently funded to work closely with government and communities to improve the safety of NSW families and the intergenerational prevention of domestic and family violence.
40. That NSW Government increase funding to DVNSW to enable the peak to work effectively with all parts of government, specialist and mainstream services, communities, media and professional bodies to implement innovative systems and frameworks and drive continual policy and practice improvement in relation to response, early intervention and the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Introduction and context

Domestic Violence NSW welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Government's domestic and family violence blueprint consultation process. As the peak body for specialist support services in our state, we have worked closely and collaboratively with DVNSW members, broader networks of specialist practitioners and government colleagues to encourage participation of service users, mainstream and specialist support providers, communities and stakeholders with an interest in improving the DFV response throughout the Blueprint scoping process and to produce a submission that reflects the diversity of the sector and our communities. In particular, we've worked with peaks through the NSW Women's Alliance to produce a detailed shared vision for policy and practice approaches that should underpin the next stage of *It Stops Here* (submitted separately). We commend the work of the Women NSW team and the Office of the NSW Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in creating a process for the sector and public to have input into system improvements for victim-survivors, families, communities and perpetrators of violence in our state.

The growing profile of survivor advocates such as Rosie Batty, mainstream media interest, increased reporting to police and political interest have all contributed to a much better understanding of the prevalence, nature and impacts of domestic and family violence (DFV) in Australia in recent years. An unprecedented spotlight has been focused on issues of sexual, domestic and family violence, particularly in the last two years. Community awareness of this violence is now significant, widespread and more nuanced. It is timely therefore, to reflect on what works in the current system and to strengthen and improve the capacity of NSW frontline services and agencies in responding both to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence as well as finding ways to better work with those who use violence.

The NSW domestic and family violence system is struggling to cope with the demand in both the government and non-government response sectors. NSW Police report that DV related assaults have increased by 2% over the last five years whilst most other crimes types are stable or dropping². Police, the courts, criminal and justice systems (including the Family Law system), specialist domestic and family violence services, homelessness service providers, specialist legal services, child protection and housing and accommodation services are all at or over capacity. Practitioners constantly have to make choices about which families they can support and to what degree they can provide assistance because of demand. This is not a problem that is unique to New South Wales. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data released this week shows that around 520,000 Australians accessed homelessness services between 2011 and 2014, with 187,000 (36%) being adults and children seeking assistance due to domestic and family violence.³ We expect support seeking and Police reports to increase as awareness continues to grow and we need to design a system that is responsive to that growth in demand whilst resourcing and growing evidential practice in early intervention and prevention.

² BOCSAR, 2015 http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_pages/Domestic-Violence.aspx

³ AIHW, 2016 *Domestic & family violence and homelessness 2011–12 to 2013–14* <http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/domestic-violence-and-homelessness/>

DVNSW recognises that there are no quick fixes when it comes to addressing system gaps or inconsistencies in service responses. Similarly, there is no “one size fits all” model solution for survivors of domestic and family violence that will work for every community in NSW, even if limitless resourcing were to be available. Domestic and family violence prevention is challenging, sophisticated work that requires an ongoing intergenerational community and government commitment. With significant, commensurate investment in our mainstream and specialist services and a long-term collaborative vision shared between government, community and the sector we can build a system that meets the immediate crisis needs of families, supports ongoing recovery from trauma and challenges the roots of violence supportive attitudes. In 2016 domestic and family violence is no longer hidden, private business. Everyone has a part to play in the elimination of domestic and family violence; intergenerational change and prevention is possible with strong consistent leadership, coordinated community prevention initiatives and a well-resourced sector that can respond to clients’ needs adeptly.

Two key principles underpin this submission:

- That all NSW citizens should be able to access timely, well-resourced domestic, family and sexual violence support responses located in their communities that are client-centred, trauma-specialist, culturally-safe and are based on the premise that DFV is a gendered crime and a violation of human rights.
- That significant long-term investment is required to develop evidence-based domestic, family and sexual violence prevention initiatives and strategies including whole of school and community programs that address entrenched gender inequality and violence supportive attitudes.

Part one of this submission directly addresses the questions identified in the Blueprint consultation. DVNSW has compiled responses to the questions outlined in the *Blueprint Public Consultation Paper* through a process of extensive consultation with specialist domestic and family violence service providers in 2015. Consultation was conducted through online surveys with DVNSW member services in October, feedback forms and workshops with DVNSW members and specialist homelessness services attending three regional forums. Evidence gathered from the surveys and workshops were supplemented with one on one interviews with practitioners from various parts of the sector. The recommendations in this submission therefore reflect the diverse views of the NSW service sector and propose strategies identified by frontline sector experts to reduce and respond to domestic and family violence.

Part two makes recommendations for key structural and system reforms required to build a robust and responsive framework to address domestic and family violence.

Part One – Responses to the *Blueprint Public Consultation Paper - Reducing and Responding to Domestic and Family Violence in NSW*

1. Preventing DFV by addressing its underlying causes

Promoting gender equality

International evidence now generally accepts that violence against women and children is directly linked to deeply entrenched social beliefs that support and promote gender inequality⁴. Our Watch's *Change the Story* framework launched in late 2015 offers a shared vision for coordinated approaches that can be adapted by NSW communities, schools, specialist services and individuals with an interest in the prevention of domestic and family violence and violence against women and children. Barriers to gender equity, which are at the core of violence supportive attitudes, require tailored messages appropriate to their audience and community. It is essential that we have strong, clear, unequivocal messages committing to challenge gender inequality from our political, community, faith and sporting leaders if we are to address the systemic causes and drivers of violence and discrimination. Prevention strategies must include specific work with children, young people, men and high-risk communities and target education, workplace, social, community and sporting settings.

“Australia has a choice. We can change the story that currently sees a woman murdered every week by a current or former partner. We can choose a future where women and their children live free from violence. Put simply, violence against women and their children is preventable.”

Our Watch, 2015

Recommendation:

- **That the NSW Government officially endorse Our Watch's *Shared Framework for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and their Children in Australia* and prioritise an ongoing funding allocation in the state budget for Our Watch and the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) for the lifespan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*.**

⁴ [http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-\(1\)/National-Primary-Prevention-Framework](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-(1)/National-Primary-Prevention-Framework)

Strong consistent leadership and community campaigns

Government must support our communities to ensure prevention messages are consistent and coordinated. Similarly, communities in NSW have a responsibility to tackle the structures that condone violence and drive effective intergenerational change. Community leaders and Elders are well equipped for this role. A number of culturally diverse communities and organisations are already doing significant work in this area. Sophisticated understandings about prevention that maximise opportunities for early intervention in specific settings, particularly high-risk communities with elevated rates of domestic and family violence or barriers to seeking support, must be integrated with local service design and tailored prevention responses if we are to effectively challenge violence in the long term. Violence is preventable but only with all parts of the community, government, mainstream and specialist sectors working together sharing common understandings, goals and measures and minimum standards for service delivery. Access to well resourced, trauma-specialist, client-centred and gender and culturally safe services in conjunction with evidence-based community-led prevention programs could significantly reduce the number of families being impacted by violence and trauma within a generation.

Recommendations:

- **NSW Government and NGOs to collaboratively develop shared understandings and principles recognising that domestic and family violence is primarily a gendered crime which violates human rights to assist communities, governments and services to design and improve local service responses and drive long-term community based prevention initiatives.**
- **That the NSW Government work with the specialist sector and local communities to co-design and adopt a coordinated, 20 year NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Plan including specific strategies, commitments and the resources necessary to respond to gender inequality and violence in the diversity of communities affected by sexual assault and domestic and family violence.**

NSW Government leadership

If we are serious about a shared commitment to long term prevention, the NSW Government must lead the way in addressing practices, attitudes, norms and behaviours that underpin and support violence against women and their children. Consistent leadership must be modelled, promoted and practiced. Programs and campaigns should be embedded throughout the public service, government departments and reform processes. This means:

- supporting employees who are or have been victims of violence that occurs out of the workplace, in their private lives (most commonly domestic or family violence and sexual assault)
- taking action to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and gender inequity in the workplace
- addressing the underlying causes of violence against women by promoting gender equality in the workplace, in educational and training settings and cultural and community spaces
- creating a culture where people feel confident to take effective bystander action if they see or hear sexism, harassment, discrimination or violence in the workplace, school or community.
- workforce development initiatives appropriate to diverse public sector environments so that all frontline facing government workers have a baseline level of knowledge about DFV and trauma and referral pathways

“We need training and awareness of all staff... Like WHS which many people see as an unnecessary part of the workplace, training in DFV is just as essential to any workplace in order to have all staff working from a perspective of understanding and openness.”

DVNSW member submission, 2015

Recommendations:

- **That the NSW Premier, alongside political and community leaders, demonstrate leadership and commitment by filming messages and public campaigns unequivocally condemning violence against women and families and continuing to make clear public statements that domestic violence is serious, a crime, a violation of human rights and will not be tolerated in NSW.**
- **The NSW Premier and other Ministers to continue to publically acknowledge the NSW Government’s respect for NGO’s expertise in specialised service provision and to ensure that specialist service expertise is valued, resourced and nurtured.**
- **That the NSW Government explore opportunities to promote gender equity and domestic and family violence prevention throughout all government departments, programs, policies and reform processes.**

Whole of school approaches

Following the 2015 announcement by Minister Goward that domestic violence will be taught as part of the NSW syllabus for young people in years 7-10, a number of domestic violence and youth service specialists working in existing programs (such as Love Bites) have identified the need for the NSW Government to invest in, and commit to, whole of school prevention and early intervention approaches. Interconnected, age appropriate whole of school approaches must begin in early childhood and be delivered consistently throughout the diversity of educational settings offering children, young people and parents a continuum of messages about healthy, respectful relationships as well as a range of opportunities for early intervention. Whole of school work requires an intensity of initial support and resourcing to begin building structural, policy and attitudinal changes in a school environment and coordinating that work with parents and the broader community. This type of approach becomes less expensive as schools adopt and model anti-violence approaches. The recently trialled Victorian school model offers a strong evidence base spec exploring effective strategies in the school environment and addressing key concepts relating to gender equality, violence and bullying.

Recommendation:

NSW Government to prioritise the development of whole of school prevention approaches in NSW across the three school sectors based on best practice developed in other jurisdictions, with particular reference to Victoria's Respectful Relationships in Schools model⁵ and Our Watch's *Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and their Children in Australia* using the expertise of the NSW youth and domestic and family violence sectors.

Tailored high risk community approaches to prevention

Our Watch's prevention framework offers an unprecedented opportunity to develop community based strategies for prevention work that are designed and engage local populations to lead their own prevention initiatives. NSW has significant gaps in strategies to address violence in high-risk populations and communities that experience barriers to accessing services. A number of proposals have been proposed to address these gaps – examples include PWDA's proposal for improving DFV service provision and tailored prevention work with women with disability, various proposals for work with women, young people and men in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, proposals for specific work with men and boys and the *Hey Sis* Aboriginal Women's peer support network program. Given that high risk communities are often significantly more at risk of being impacted by violence and are less likely to identify abuse or intersect with support services, we have a compelling and urgent

⁵ [http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-\(1\)/Respectful-Relationships-Education-in-Schools-\(Vic](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-(1)/Respectful-Relationships-Education-in-Schools-(Vic)

need to concretely address their experiences through tailored community led prevention work and well resourced support networks.

In order to address these gaps systemically and with a long term shared vision, significant work must be undertaken engaging practitioners, policymakers and community leaders to design structures and programs that will work in local settings and build on existing practice wisdom. Minister Goward's 2014 Violent Domestic Crimes Taskforce Aboriginal, CALD and legal roundtables were a good example of the type of co-design approach that could be taken to address high risk population strategies.

"We need models that truly reflect community needs, are targeted and specific to the domestic violence needs of a community"

SHS forum participant, 2015

Recommendations:

- **Government and community taskforces with diverse representation to co-design specific approaches to prevention, early intervention and best practice responses for high risk populations including Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ communities and people with disability.**
- **Implementation of a NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy with a priority given to exploring the work undertaken in Aboriginal communities in relation to perpetration of violence. The Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy would intersect with a strong, well-resourced Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Network to develop consistent and evidence-based best practice initiatives to supporting Aboriginal women, families, men and communities impacted by violence and trauma.**
- **A NSW Aboriginal Women's Advisory Group with members having expertise in sexual assault and DFV should be established and meet regularly with relevant Ministers and Departmental Secretaries to ensure Aboriginal people have ongoing opportunities to contribute to the development and implementation of the NSW Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy and any other strategies or policies relating to the women of NSW. Regional networks within Aboriginal communities also need to be established and resourced to ensure ongoing conversations about sexual assault and DFV which will feed through to the NSW Aboriginal Advisory Group.**

2. Intervening early to support those at risk of DFV

Definitions of Early Intervention

Services commonly note that early intervention in the specialist domestic and family violence context can differ from other sectors. In its submission to the 2015 Victorian Royal Commission, DVVIC defines family violence early intervention as, “earlier identification and mitigation of the effects of violence as well as stopping men from continuing to use violence. For the women and children experiencing family violence, it means being safe or safer than they would have been, averting crisis situations, and having access to supports so they can live their lives with safety and dignity”.⁶

An integrated system with multiple access points

A fully integrated system requires consistent approaches to risk assessment for domestic and family violence in a range of responses, so that early intervention can take place consistently wherever a woman and her family makes contact with the system and she can be connected to specialist best practice support that is culturally appropriate responsive to the family’s needs. Multiple soft-entry points require adequate resourcing, strong partnerships, workforce development and ongoing support in both mainstream and specialist services. These must be integrated with a system for rapid referral to trauma specialist domestic and family violence support, which should be accessible regardless of geography.

Mixed service models

Service and system integration is challenging but achievable where multi-agency approaches are designed at a local level. Services and districts can be encouraged to develop models that best meet the needs of clients wherever they enter the support system and should include a mix of specialist women’s services, multi-service and agency hubs and domestic and family violence specialist workers located in mainstream early intervention and family support services. Mainstream services such as Centrelink, early childhood centres, GPs, mental health and drug and alcohol support programs all offer opportunities for early identification and rapid referral to occur.

Recommendations:

- **Consistent standards and pathways for domestic and family violence risk assessment, referral and management should be implemented and supported by a well resourced integrated DFV system that has specialist and mainstream services working with mutual respect.**

⁶ DVVIC, 2015. P. 20 <http://www.dvvic.org.au/images/DV%20Vic%20Submission%20to%20the%20Royal%20Commission%20-%20Specialisation.pdf>

- That an NGO domestic and family violence specialist regional coordinator position be established in each FaCS/Health district and resourced to grow and maintain connections between specialist and mainstream NGOs, government agencies and communities including regular mapping of the service system and gaps, identifying local emerging issues and supporting best practice responses to domestic and family violence.

Common tools to assess risk

A significant number of DVNSW members have identified the need for common risk assessment frameworks and tools to ensure that clients are getting a consistent support and referral approach. One example of this is the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT) which should to be evaluated and adapted if it were to be considered useful in settings outside the Safer Pathways system. NSW Health has significant expertise and well-evidenced evaluations of their use of routine screening tools with women in health settings. Evidence-based practice on risk assessment and management should be considered by a range of specialist services and government agencies as a matter of urgency to allow for consistency in application method and response. Services have also identified the need to assess perpetrator risk in addition to the risk to the woman and family.

“Community organisations (including schools) need awareness training on warning signs that a relationship is not healthy; awareness on their rights & responsibilities also.

DVNSW member submission, 2015

Recommendation:

- Government and domestic and family violence specialists to co-design strategies, tools and training around early identification of domestic and family violence, identification of the primary victim and primary aggressor, using best practice to identify and manage ongoing risk to women and their children as well as the perpetrator.

Early intervention and justice systems

The intersection between the Family Law system, domestic violence courts and support services and child protection is a major challenge for women and families impacted by violence in addition to being an opportunity for early risk assessment and referral. DVNSW members and survivors of violence commonly identify systems failures in both the service and criminal justice systems many of which could be partially addressed through specialised workforce development and training for police, prosecutors, judicial officers, court staff, legal practitioners and other justice workers on risk assessment, management and appropriate referral, the nature and dynamics of domestic, family and sexual violence and the impacts of trauma.

Recommendations:

- **That a taskforce with specialist legal experts, advocates and support services be set up to explore the experiences of families impacted by domestic and family violence in the Family Court, Child Protection and legal and criminal justice systems in NSW with the purpose of improving responses to survivors of violence.**
- **An investment in appropriate workforce development on the impacts of domestic and family violence and complex trauma for frontline staff and management across all government departments but specifically in the child protection and justice systems.**

Safe, accessible housing and accommodation

NSW has a lack of safe, affordable support options for families impacted by domestic and family violence. Women and children who need to leave the family home often face lengthy waits and fragmented processes when attempting to secure crisis support and temporary or longer-term accommodation. There is a lack of crisis accommodation across the state and families are routinely referred to emergency temporary accommodation (often in motels or caravan parks) whilst they are waiting for longer term options to be available. Temporary accommodation is often unsafe and access to outreach support highly dependent on the capacity of services which are often stretched. Effective crisis and early intervention responses can be challenging when a victim-survivor of violence is unable to access safe and affordable accommodation.

Ultimately this means that women of all socio-demographics often stay in abusive relationships (or return to them) because of a lack of safe and appropriate housing options. Client-centred, responsive, trauma-specialist support over a transitional period is required to help women rebuild their lives following experiences of domestic and family violence whether they choose stay in the family home with or without the perpetrator, are supported through the crisis system or are able to make private housing arrangements.

For some cohorts the challenges are amplified by fears that services or providers may not understand their needs. LGBTIQ people who have experienced domestic and family violence are vulnerable when accessing mainstream crisis services and emergency accommodation due to fears of (or experiences of) homophobia and transphobia and discrimination. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and culturally and linguistically diverse women (CALD) families experience similar difficulties finding safe and culturally appropriate accommodation where they can remain connected to family and community. Women with disability face multiple barriers to accessing information, support or accommodation that meet their needs.

There are multiple systemic and cultural barriers that make leaving the family home almost inconceivable for victim-survivors of violence. Many find it just too hard to contemplate leaving an abusive relationship and their home as the alternative solutions are filled with uncertainty. Older women and young women on lower incomes

have very few options and are also vulnerable in a social housing system that is already overburdened. Older CALD women face multiple disadvantages and vulnerability as they often rely on family members for support and speak languages other than English so can experience language barriers.

Recommendation:

- **That the NSW Parliament make a long term, bipartisan government commitment and strategy to ensure a range of safe and affordable housing and support options are accessible to women and families impacted by domestic violence (as well as perpetrators of violence) including expansion of Staying Home Leaving Violence services, dedicated specialist DFV crisis accommodation, transitional, social and community housing and diverse private rental accommodation models and subsidies.**

Flexible support models

A key challenge to effective client support consistently identified by practitioners is lack of flexibility in access to brokerage, support periods, outreach and counselling. The brokerage attached to the *Staying Home Leaving Violence* program and Safe at Home models in other jurisdictions is considered to be a successful option for some families. Evaluations of the model have found that SHLV is highly valued by the women who use it. Further resources need to be attached to specialist services to ensure that families for whom the SHLV model is appropriate are supported in the long term, that well coordinated local networks between support services and justice agencies are developed and that *Staying Home Leaving Violence* is available throughout NSW.

We desperately need appropriate, supportive and affordable accommodation options available for women experiencing domestic violence in each community. We need to give them real options to leave violence"

SHS forum participant, 2015

Recommendation:

- **That a working group be established to explore flexible models for access to brokerage, support periods, outreach and counselling in a range of specialist service environments (SHS, SHLV, refuge and crisis accommodation, outreach etc).**

Residential perpetrator services

A number of member services have suggested that NSW should consider options for short and longer term perpetrator accommodation particularly in rural and regional communities. Aboriginal women from a local Family Violence Committee in the Far West region told DVNSW in 2015, "there's nowhere for him to go, so the Police take him away and he comes back the next day. What am I supposed to do? I can't just make him homeless."

Recommendation:

- **NSW Government should explore the success of established programs such as Breathing Space in Western Australia and consider options for short and medium term removal of perpetrators with wraparound behaviour change programs, trauma specialists and access to drug and alcohol programs in specialist perpetrator residential services.**

Coordination of reforms and approaches to early intervention

For early intervention, crisis and prevention programs and models to work effectively together, Government must recognise that issues such as short term funding cycles and isolated program design create fundamental barriers to services working together. Multiple government initiatives and reforms in various stages of implementation often lack of coordination across communities and service structures. There are several government initiatives and reforms in various stages of implementation aimed at reducing the prevalence of domestic and family violence and delivering better services but too often reforms are developed in isolation and with varying degrees of input from non-government agencies and the sector that they will impact. For example, the DFV Blueprint must be integrated with the Targeted Early Intervention Reform process if we are to develop policy that improves the safety of families.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth recently undertook a review of research and practice in prevention and early intervention child and family service systems in Australia and identified a common set of systemic issues.⁷ It found:

- A fragmented and poorly coordinated system in which specific service sectors largely focus on particular issues or groups of vulnerable people without a whole of system view.
- A program focus instead of a client focus, where the onus is on people to make sense of services, navigate from door to door and 'fit' a program to qualify for support.
- Services which fail to consider the family circumstances of clients, in particular the existence and experience of children.
- A traditional welfare approach that focuses on crisis support and stabilisation, and that may encourage dependency.
- A focus on solving problems after they occur rather than anticipating and intervening to prevent them arising (Department of Human Services (DHS), 2011).

⁷ ARACY, 2015 Better Systems, Better Chances: A Review of Research and Practice for Prevention and Early Intervention. P.15
http://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/335168/better_systems_better_chances_review.pdf

ARACY recommends:

- The development of a common approach to measuring outcomes to provide accountability and embed the measurement of effectiveness and building of evidence at all levels of the system,
- Data-driven local planning and commissioning, local approaches to needs assessment, service planning and resourcing,
- Building 'evidence ready' systems and using evidence to guide investment decisions and service provision,
- Developing shared values and a common approach to identifying needs and intervention thresholds, and processes and structures that enable and promote shared ways of working;
- Matching services to needs: assessment and planning processes that respond holistically to meeting the needs of children and families, and focus on building their capacity and working towards improved outcomes; and
- Key principles: grounding the system in the core principles of a holistic approach, strengths-based practice, working in partnership with families, and building capacity.

Recommendations:

- **That models for common assessment and outcome measurement be explored using peak and sector expertise with a focus on local models of service and integrated reform to ensure consistency in family safety across departmental reform processes.**
- **That ARACY's principles for strengths-based practice, shared values and common approaches to risk assessment and early intervention working with families to build their capacity be embedded in domestic and family violence and early intervention systems.**

Strengths-based procurement

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

Recommendation:

- That the NSW Government undertake a review of the competitive tendering process for human services that examines best practice models in other jurisdictions, particularly those that facilitate co-design, collaboration and joint tendering, and includes consultation with NGO service providers.

3. Supporting the safety and recovery of victims

DVNSW has had considerable feedback from specialist domestic and family violence services and practitioners about what safe and effective service delivery looks like. Through a series of forums and workshops in the latter half of 2015 we worked with specialist homelessness services, members and DFV practitioners to identify a set of principles which should underpin an integrated specialist service system that effectively supports the safety and recovery of women and families impacted by DFV. DVNSW will continue to work with the sector in 2016 to explore the feasibility for a code of practice, minimum standards and accreditation (see part two of this submission for more detail).

Recommendations for an integrated service system supporting safety and recovery:

- **A sustainable, well-resourced sector.**

This requires government to commit to long term, guaranteed, sustainable and dedicated funding for specialist family and domestic violence services for minimum 5 year periods. DVNSW notes services identify the need for a simplified funding model and structure that:

- is secure, sustainable, transparent and accountable
- is commensurate and responsive to the level of demand and range of services needed
- guarantees specialist DFV services can perform their core business, including crisis response, accommodation and outreach, specialist child support, post-crisis support, prevention and early intervention programs, client advocacy, case management and safety planning, telephone support including after hours, shelter for pets, assistance to find housing, employment, education and training, therapeutic work (group and individual), partner support for Men's Behaviour Change Programs, developing and building local networks, specialist support for women with disability, LGBTIQ, Aboriginal, CALD, older women, young women etc

- enables specialist DFV services to attract and retain a specialised, skilled workforce with appropriate conditions, salary rates, and professional development and career progression opportunities, and
 - enables services to support a wrap-around service system, whereby specialist workers can be employed to work with children, Aboriginal women and families, people who identify as LGBTIQ, people with mental health issues, people with disability, and perpetrators where appropriate.
- **Safe and affordable accommodation options.**

This includes quality crisis accommodation services that provide 24/7 on site care and case management by experienced female professional staff. Specialist DFV services provide a unique and highly specialised response to those seeking help. Working with women and children experiencing DFV is a complex, dynamic and sensitive process. The characteristics of DFV are unique: women and children live with fear and anxiety as a result of physical, sexual or psychological abuse by the person they love and who often purports to love them. They may feel ashamed and guilty about their experience and have often been made to feel that they are to blame for the abuse and consequently have little self-confidence. It's common for perpetrators to isolate women and children from family and friends. Women from all walks of life are equally at risk of experiencing DFV, although women with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, refugee and immigrant women, LGBTIQ people and women living in regional and remote areas face additional and different risks. These risks also require specialist knowledge and response, and therefore the provision and investment in culturally safe and appropriate services is critical.

- **A valued and well developed workforce.**

The DFV sector workforce needs to be developed and supported with regular professional development. Workers must be adequately trained in a practice model that is informed by sophisticated knowledge of the gendered nature, dynamics, impacts and long term consequences of DFV. This specialist training and knowledge ensures specialist services are able to provide comprehensive risk assessment and safety planning with women. Assessing risk and drafting comprehensive case management strategies in these situations requires a high level of specialist skill - and can be a matter of life and death, particularly at the time of separation.

- **Client-centred, intensive, trauma-specialist service delivery with multiple supports wrapped around individuals to provide support and safety when DFV is identified.**

All services and government agencies need to have a clear understanding of the gendered nature of violence and embed the principles of best practice in all work. Successful service delivery has been recommended in the form of a one-stop-shop where possible by offering clients a holistic service (such as

combining counselling with casework) and hosting other services clients may need, and facilitating information exchange (with client consent) to minimise retelling of stories.

- **Accessible services** (i.e transport, childcare availability) as well as available outside Monday – Friday, 9am - 5pm opening hours. This need is amplified in rural, regional and remote locations.

“To fully engage a women and her children, staff need to be highly skilled with a range of other highly skilled support agencies. There is no quick fix in terms of DV and yet the investment does not equal the required multi-faceted responses required over a very long period of time”

DVNSW member submission, 2015

4. Ensuring perpetrator accountability

Coordinating NGO specialist and government approaches to perpetrator work

Current approaches (both government and non-government) to work with perpetrators of violence in NSW are inconsistent. There are currently few formalised structures for coordination between government and NGO perpetrator interventions resulting in differing understandings and definitions of risk, inconsistent mechanisms to ensure perpetrator accountability and family safety and a lack of opportunities to share the lessons and best practice being developed by specialists within and outside the justice system. Successful trauma specialist interventions are highly dependent on coordinated, structured, evidence based approaches. Effective risk assessment processes, which are responsive to rapidly changing circumstances, often correlate to the strength of local or systemic relationships developed between non-government community-based specialist DFV services and Police, Justice, Child Protection and other government agencies.

Funding for NGO Men’s Behaviour Change work

In NSW, Men’s Behaviour Change Programs and perpetrator interventions have been developed over the past two decades by NGOs with no government funding. Government funded initiatives delivered within the criminal justice system and in the Justice/Community Corrections context have to date been largely disconnected from community-based specialist services supporting women and children impacted by men’s violence and from non-government MBC interventions.

Ultimately, to develop strategies to intervene effectively with perpetrators of domestic and family violence there need to be well resourced, collaborative approaches where government and NGO agencies work together to ensure safety of women and children. There also needs to be an improved justice with a focus on the

disconnect between the Children's Court, Family Court and domestic violence system, whereby those working within courts have a nuanced understanding of the complexities of domestic and family violence.

"We need a more informed, accountable and comprehensive justice system that has an informed understanding of domestic and family violence."

SHS forum participant, 2015

Recommendations for effective work with perpetrators:

- **Minimum standards for all practitioners working in behaviour change should be urgently developed in collaboration with key MBC network service providers, NGOs and professional bodies to ensure that perpetrators of violence can access or be referred to quality interventions that are consistent, local and grounded in the most recent evidence. Resource the NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network to develop future work, standards and models of practice in line with research and practice identified through ANROWS and No To Violence including establishment of common, shared mechanisms to track and evaluate best practice approaches to all work with offenders and families by government and non-government agencies.**
- **Each FaCS/ Local Health District to appoint a key NGO contact to oversee Men's Behaviour Change work and progress in the area. This contact would monitor and oversee behaviour change responses/programs in the area, support practitioners working in the field and collaborate with relevant services and agencies (such as the police, local specialist domestic violence services, community corrections, health services and Safer Pathways sites) to ensure appropriate referrals take place and interventions are accessible.**
- **Invest in specialist workers from the DFV sector to work in, and with, Community Corrections and non-governmental Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) interventions to ensure consistent approaches across government and non-government programs. Structures to be formalised to nurture existing and new relationship networks between Community Corrections offender work and NGO MBC sectors.**
- **All NGO and Community Corrections programs and practitioners to comply with NSW MBC Program Minimum Standards. Ensure there are regular reviews of these standards including accreditation and regular auditing of programs. NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network to be resourced to play a key role in this work.**
- **Invest in specialist training for existing behaviour change practitioners, as well as for teachers, youth workers, juvenile justice workers and police. Police training is to include promotion of the Men's Referral Service and referral to local MBC Programs when responding to incidents of DFV.**

- All male perpetrators of violence should be automatically referred to the Men's Referral Service (MRS) for assessment and support. Safety Action Meetings should refer perpetrators to the MRS and wherever available a local MBC Program or intervention that meets the minimum standards.
- NSW Government to resource specialist domestic and family violence services and Men's Behaviour Change specialists to create service support structures for families and partners.
- Form an expert panel of government, community and non-government specialist stakeholders with an interest in developing perpetrator interventions that promote a consistent approach to work with offenders, ongoing consideration of best practice and developments in evidence and research.
- All ADVO offenders to be assessed and referred to a local behaviour change program or practitioner that meets the minimum standards.
- Engage courts more consistently with MBCPs, including establishing a process so that consistent referrals from courts to a local MBCP occur that meets the minimum standards, and employ specialist workers in courts who can engage men interacting with the justice system early or at key points – similar to the women's domestic violence court advocacy system model.
- Partner support work to be recognised as a key element of specialist DFV service delivery and for resources to be allocated to women and children's services to develop this work.

"NSW needs more training and skilled clinicians who can help hold men accountable while they explore their reasons for using violence. Many men we work with mention a distinct lack of services options across Sydney where they can access accredited programs regarding DV. Funding to provide these programs would be greatly welcomed as it would remove a barrier for some men who literally cannot afford to pay to attend these groups"

DVNSW member submission, 2015

Part Two – The role of peaks in developing and supporting a sustainable, robust and accountable domestic and family violence system

Domestic Violence NSW mission is to eliminate violence by supporting the sector and government to improve services and policy responses to women, families and communities impacted by domestic and family violence. Following major structural change in 2015, in February 2016 we have more than fifty member organisations representing diverse specialist practice models and services working in communities throughout NSW. The NSW Women's Refuge Movement (WRM) had a strong history of developing client-centred practice and innovation through multiple sets of reforms whilst also managing a number of frontline services working with women and children. In 2013 WRM members voted to split the business service delivery arm from the peak, representative body and DVNSW was incorporated. Since then we have opened up the peak's membership to all specialist domestic and family violence services and services supporting women and children in recognition of the multiple access points and types of specialist service response accessed by families impacted by violence. An independent non-service delivery peak model means that we are able to advocate for the best outcomes for women, families and communities impacted by domestic and family violence rather than a specific service model.

DVNSW has a key role in the NSW domestic and family violence system and in developing good policy and best practice. We are developing new governance and policy development structures so that a diverse range of practitioner perspectives from our membership can continually inform the policy work of the peak. We survey all organisational members regularly to create robust policy positions and provide advice to multiple government departments including NSW Department of Family and Community Services, Department of Justice, NSW Police, Women NSW and the Department of Premier and Cabinet as well as the Commonwealth. In 2013 DVNSW and Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia brought together a number of peaks and specialist statewide representative organisations working in sexual assault and domestic and family violence, which resulted in the creation of the NSW Women's Alliance. DVNSW co-convenes and provides secretariat functions for the NSW Women's Alliance. We have developed solid internal and external structures to assist us to act as a sounding board and critical friend to government and to provide advice on emerging grassroots issues in relation to domestic and family violence policy and practice.

Over the last two years DVNSW has built strong connections with local, regional and national media. DVNSW is now regarded as one of the major media voices in Australia on domestic and family violence and our membership values our ability to message issues impacting on the sector and on women and children. We work closely with media and survivor advocates to ensure that a range of voices are heard and reflective of current systemic issues. As the peak we are regularly called upon to provide expert advice to professional bodies, community organisations and more recently corporations and businesses. We advised and worked with the ABC to produce Sarah Ferguson's *Hitting Home* over a period of 18 months. We continue to work closely with media to provide advice and referrals to other expert voices.

The scope of the peak's work has expanded substantially since DVNSW was incorporated in 2013. We receive core funding of \$330,000 per annum (from Women NSW and FaCS) and have a core staff of CEO, 1 full time Policy Officer and 2 part time administrative and operations positions. Our core functions are supplemented by a full time SHS Project Officer funded under the SHS Industry partnership by FaCS. DVNSW's capacity to provide a representative voice, timely advice to multiple government departments, Ministers and all levels of bureaucracy, support services and non-member agencies, encourage sector development and best practice as well as working with communities, media and professional bodies is seriously compromised by the current funding arrangement.

During 2015, DVNSW worked with members and the broader sector to develop a plan for the future work of the peak in relation to developing and supporting a sustainable, responsive service sector. A number of key projects and areas of development have been identified through our work with the sector, government and external agencies but require resourcing if we are to support and develop a robust and accountable domestic and family violence system in NSW including:

- **Outcomes measurement** – development of a core set of measures that would align with multiple sets of national and state frameworks concerned with improving the safety of women, children, families and communities. DVNSW has worked with FaMS and RLG Australia to scope the potential for better client outcomes throughout specialist and mainstream service provision. The domestic and family violence sector has voiced its desire to develop common indicators to evaluate and measure the success of its work.
- **Development of a DVNSW code of practice for service delivery** – initial scoping work for a code of practice for domestic and family violence service delivery is being explored through our Industry Partnership Project. Implementation of a code of practice would require support for some services and the creation of tools, templates and model policies.
- **Minimum standards and accreditation** – a number of DVNSW member services and services working with women and families are already delivering programs where adherence to minimum standards is required. Throughout our work with the sector in 2015 there has been a strong endorsement for the development of minimum standards and a statewide quality assurance framework for domestic and family violence service provision which would include NGO and government services and practitioners.
- **Sector development and partnerships** – DVNSW has a key role to play in the ongoing development of the sector, workforce development and strategies to encourage sector and business partnerships (including social impact investment opportunities). Increased interest in the issue of domestic and family violence from outside the service sector means that there are opportunities for educational

institutions and the peak to work collaboratively to develop modules for sector workforce development, core units of competency for mainstream practitioners, government employees and basic understanding for non-DFV workers.

Recommendations:

- **That the role and specialist expertise of peak bodies for the domestic and family violence system in NSW be recognised and valued by including peak representatives at all levels of government reform including strategic long term planning for prevention, early intervention and responses. That peaks representing children, family, health, women, young people and high risk populations be recurrently funded to work closely with government and communities to improve the safety of NSW families and the intergenerational prevention of domestic and family violence.**
- **That NSW Government increase funding to DVNSW to enable the peak to work effectively with all parts of government, specialist and mainstream services, communities, media and professional bodies to implement innovative systems and frameworks and drive continual policy and practice improvement in relation to response, early intervention and the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence.**