



Communities  
& Justice

# Communities' domestic and family violence stakeholder engagement summary

Supporting Communities' input to the development of the Department of Communities and Justice Domestic and Family Violence Strategy 2020–2024

February 2020

# Introduction

This summary of stakeholder engagement findings represents the highlights of consultations undertaken by ThinkPlace to assist with development of the Domestic and Family Violence Strategy for the former Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), now part of the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ).

Recently it was decided to consolidate the work of both FACS and Justice into a single DCJ Domestic and Family Violence Strategy (the Strategy). This Strategy is being developed in response to the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016–2021 (the Blueprint), which outlined the direction the NSW domestic violence system would take for the next five years.

FACS, which we will refer to as ‘Communities’ in this document, incorporates a broad range of human services including housing and homelessness, child protection, early support, domestic and family violence crisis support, Youth Justice and helplines. Our service system faces continued challenges in how to effectively support people affected by domestic and family violence, particularly how to contribute to meaningful, sustained and positive change across NSW.

Over recent years, Communities has introduced significant initiatives that have changed and strengthened the response to domestic and family violence across housing and child protection including expansion of the Staying Home Leaving Violence program, strong investment in Rent Choice Start Safely, development and delivery of the NSW Practice Framework for caseworkers; and changes to family preservation programs to reflect evidence-informed practice. These initiatives continue to show improvements in performance and better outcomes for clients. By consulting stakeholders directly, Communities hoped to receive feedback and new ideas to build on this work.

ThinkPlace’s findings provided the opportunity to better understand the thoughts and priorities of people who have experienced or used domestic and family violence, as well as members of the service sector who support them. In developing the Strategy, we have used what we heard during this stakeholder engagement together with research of current local and international evidence-informed best practice alongside analysis of our own program data.

## How the stakeholder engagement project was conducted

During July and August 2019, ThinkPlace engaged over 120 individual stakeholders, including clients and representatives from over 20 organisations, in one-on-one interviews and focus groups in South Western Sydney and Western NSW. ThinkPlace then tested its findings in a statewide workshop with DCJ program staff, other relevant government agencies, and peak organisations representing LGBTIQ, Aboriginal and CALD communities, young people and people with mental health issues.

Throughout the stakeholder engagement, including the workshop, participants were asked to reflect on the system today and consider opportunities for meaningful and sustained change to improve outcomes for people affected by domestic and family violence in NSW. As supports for domestic and family violence are delivered through a broad service system encompassing health, education, justice and other services in addition to services offered by Communities, many of their comments reflected the broader system. Although outside Communities’ responsibility, these comments have been included in this summary to present a more complete picture.

# The outcomes stakeholders said they wanted to see

ThinkPlace synthesised the opportunities that stakeholders identified into nine outcomes they wanted to see for the future of the system. It then identified relevant areas of focus to deliver each outcome. The outcomes and associated areas of focus will contribute to the development of DCJ Domestic and Family Violence Strategy.

The nine outcomes are presented with their relevant areas of focus on the following pages. The blue boxes outline highlights within each outcomes.

- Outcome 1** People have self-determination and are empowered throughout their journey.
- Outcome 2** People are supported to understand and navigate the system.
- Outcome 3** The system supports early intervention and sustained positive change.
- Outcome 4** Those who use violence are held to account and supported to change.
- Outcome 5** Young people are supported over their lifetime.
- Outcome 6** Services and support are tailored to diverse people and varied needs.
- Outcome 7** People have access to appropriate, safe and affordable housing.
- Outcome 8** People have support from a capable and empathetic workforce.
- Outcome 9** Services coordinate and collaborate to deliver shared outcomes.

# Outcome 1: People have self-determination and are empowered throughout their journey

**Self-determination and empowerment for clients emerged as prominent themes. Both service providers and workshop participants told us that clients needed choice and to feel that they had control in their engagement with us.**

## **Connecting clients with support services**

For example, the system needs to acknowledge the financial costs, resources and time it takes for victim-survivors to access support—including access to childcare—especially if separated from their family, friends and community. The connection between domestic and family violence and financial dependence needs to be considered when supporting people to become independent.

*We need to help give clients agency and a sense of options and choice so they feel empowered.*  
Workshop participant

The system and services that exist to support people should not disempower them or cause more trauma. Clients show strengths just by starting the journey, and service providers need to build on them.

*Strengths-based approach is critical. We must treat people with respect and dignity.*  
Workshop participant

Some people will seek to maintain connections and relationships with those who have used violence. It is necessary to provide support pathways to build healthier relationships and change negative behaviours.

## **Co-design services and build awareness of options for change**

For sustained change, individuals and communities must know how to make positive change. This includes building awareness and understanding of domestic and family violence within their community and changing enabling practices.

The effectiveness of different communities' services is influenced by factors invisible to those outside the community. Engaging and co-designing services with key people and communities to consider these factors and context enhances service effectiveness.

*DV survivors who have been empowered and started their own recovery are powerful role models and potential mentors.*  
Workshop participant

## **Tackle impact of inequality**

The ongoing impact of historic and continued racism and inequality in Aboriginal communities is a major obstacle to people seeking and having access to the help they need. This needs to be structurally addressed throughout the system to ensure equality of services and outcomes, especially in out-of-home care. The system can empower rural and regional communities by working with them to build on existing strengths in the community. These strengths may be in the form of traditional community structures or practices, or local leadership.

## **Outcome highlights**

- 1.1 Improving access to childcare and other resources which help give people control over their journey
- 1.2 Increasing strengths-based approaches which build on the resilience people have shown
- 1.3 Enabling and empowering families, friends and communities to drive positive change for themselves and those around them
- 1.4 Providing support pathways for people who want to remain together and build healthier relationships and families
- 1.5 Co-designing services and programs with the individuals and communities they are designed to serve
- 1.6 Helping people establish and maintain financial independence
- 1.7 Working to address historical racism and inequality in the system
- 1.8 Adjusting program funding guidelines to build on existing strengths and build sustainable capability in communities

# Outcome 2: People are supported to understand and navigate the system

People said that engaging with and navigating the system could be draining. Complex processes combined with managing the substantial change required of clients can be a burden and barrier for those seeking support.

## Raising awareness of local services

It is still the case that people who need support don't know where and how to access the right services. Education campaigns are essential to create better awareness to assist those seeking support and those around them who can help guide them.

*If women in general don't know about services, what about CALD people and those who can't read English?*

Workshop participant

## Streamline pathways

Even once people are in the system it can be exhausting and demoralising to navigate. To help people overcome this, streamlined pathways should be provided so people can understand the process and take control of their journey.

*We need to help reduce the overwhelming nature of the system and allow people to control their pace through the system.*

Workshop participant

The quality of service received and the experience of navigating the system is significantly enhanced by the help of an appropriately skilled and experienced case manager or caseworker.

Access to case management and support workers across the system and the state should be improved to enhance consistency of servicing and outcomes.

*Appropriate case coordination. Someone that assists with these tasks rather than all different service providers.*

Workshop participant

## Engender trust

The history and reputation of child protection is alive in people's minds. Many still fear it, and avoid accessing services because they believe their children will be taken away.

To reduce people's apprehension and increase their willing engagement with the service system, those seeking support need to understand how the child protection system currently works, and have trust that child removal is only a last resort.

*People need early access to specialist legal advice and supported services before issues escalate to potential removal of children.*

Workshop participant

## Outcome highlights

- 2.1 Enhancing awareness of services so that people directly and indirectly affected are better able to find the support they need
- 2.2 Streamlining pathways through the system so people better know where to start and where to go next
- 2.3 Increasing access to case management and holistic support workers
- 2.4 Building understanding and trust across the system of what child protection does and doesn't do

# Outcome 3: The system supports early intervention and sustained positive change

Stakeholders stressed that domestic and family violence is often not the first reason, nor the only reason, a client comes into contact with the service system. There are multiple opportunities for services to connect with them early and work to prevent escalation to crisis.

## Pre-empt early signs

People affected by domestic and family violence often come in contact with the Communities service system or peripheral systems many times before they actually engage and seek support. There are opportunities to make better use of this early contact to build their awareness and understanding of the supports available to them, and help enable them to access support sooner.

*We need to move from crisis to early intervention to avoid escalation.*  
Workshop participant

While violence is not always related to a pattern of trauma passed from generation to generation, the system needs to acknowledge that it can be, and consider how to prevent trauma and other harm resulting from violence from risking further violence. Acknowledgement of generational trauma may also build readiness for change in those who have used or are using domestic and family violence.

*Change programs are framed around stopping deaths or stopping people going to jail. This is too late in the piece.*  
Workshop participant

## Respond to clients' early self assessment

The system needs to acknowledge that people are best able to understand and see risks in the situation they are in and the behaviour of those around them. The system must provide adequate and appropriate support for those express fear of domestic and family violence so they can proactively be ensured of safety.

*Young LGBTIQ people often leave to try to pre-empt violence or want to get out before it gets worse when their family finds out about their sexuality.*  
Service provider

## Provide supports to build coping strategies

To create positive and sustained change, the system must provide sufficient supports and services to help people build safe coping strategies and skills to manage stress, anger and anxiety.

*We need to make sure we are still supporting drug and alcohol recovery, otherwise that is what people will go to when they need help.*  
Workshop participant

People need supports and tools that enable them to create and sustain healthy relationships and families.

## Outcome highlights

- 3.1 Making the most of every point of contact with the system to build understanding and awareness, and provide appropriate support
- 3.2 Investing in addressing the trauma of people who have used or are at risk of using domestic and family violence
- 3.3 Providing support pathways for those concerned about the potential of violence or escalation of violence
- 3.4 Developing programs to build other skills and coping strategies

# Outcome 4: Those who use violence are held to account and supported to change

**Accountability for people who use domestic and family violence does not lie exclusively with the criminal justice system. Communities has an important role to play.**

## **Shift the burden of change from victim survivors**

Currently, it appears the burden is overwhelmingly on victim-survivors to make changes to their life and behaviours to ensure their own safety, particularly through moving and finding safe and stable housing. While good steps have been taken, it is vital to continue systemic changes to adjust this focus and ensure the burden is shifted to the people who have used domestic and family violence.

*Their [user of domestic and family violence's] behaviour is stagnant while the victim-survivor has to change their life completely.*  
Service provider

## **Support to change behaviour**

People who have used violence need to be supported to change their behaviours, and adequate services need to be in place. Support options for those who use violence beyond just men's behaviour change programs, and entry pathways to build readiness and post-program support, will help sustain change and progress.

*We need to make sure we have the funds and space available to help someone when they are ready to make the change, not in three months' time when a space opens up.*  
Service provider

*We need to acknowledge the trauma of those who use violence so we can help them build resilience and coping strategies, and to look for the strengths they are showing when they do try to seek help and support.*  
Service provider

People who use domestic and family violence must acknowledge what they are doing is coercive and violent behaviour that must stop, before being able to make meaningful change. Best practice, evidence based awareness programs and clear paths for supported behaviour change need to continue to be enhanced.

*The fact is some people are surrounded by so much violence—how do they identify it in their own life when it is so normalised?*  
Workshop participant

## **Outcome highlights**

- 4.1 Ensuring people who have used violence carry the burden of necessary change
- 4.2 Providing people who have used violence the support they need when they need it
- 4.3 Building understanding and awareness that what they are doing is domestic and family violence and how to change their behaviour

# Outcome 5: Young people are supported over their life

Stakeholders felt the system was focused on addressing individual behaviours or situations rather than broader patterns and the needs of everyone affected. The complex needs of children and young people who have experienced violence in their home may be overlooked and misunderstood.

## Address the complex effects of trauma and disruption

Tackling domestic and family violence causes significant change in the lives of all those affected, especially children. The need to move away from existing support networks, and change schools and routine, can create trauma. This should be acknowledged and effectively addressed throughout a child's journey to recovery.

*We need to move from only focusing on parents and move towards trauma-focused support for children, including specialist support.*  
Workshop participant

Children and young people often face unique challenges throughout their journey. The system needs to consider how to identify, understand and address these challenges over their life. Recovery takes time and without ongoing support, trauma may result in other risky behaviours, unhealthy relationships and the repetition of violence.

*We need to consider how to support a young person who won't leave home because they need to protect their younger sibling and don't want to report because they don't want to be separated.*

Workshop participant

*Victims think it is normal—more work needs to be done with younger people to promote healthy relationships.*

Workshop participant

## Educate young people about safely reporting violence

People need to be able to identify domestic and family violence early and understand how to seek help for themselves and those around them. Education and awareness programs should be targeted to children and young people throughout their schooling, including providing safe ways to anonymously and safely report violence.

*We need specific services to help young people and children effectively tell their story.*

Workshop participant

## Outcome highlights

- 5.1 Supporting children and young people to manage the trauma of change
- 5.2 Supporting children and young people over their life to meet their unique challenges
- 5.3 Building understanding and awareness of domestic and family violence in children and young people

# Outcome 6: Services and support are tailored to diverse people and varied needs

**Providing access to appropriate supports for diverse clients, especially Aboriginal clients, was seen to be an ongoing issue. This included recognising that not everyone will respond to programs and supports in the same way.**

## **Ensure programs are culturally appropriate**

Beyond ensuring those providing support and services have a reasonable level of cultural and community competency, services and programs also need to be culturally and community appropriate to minimise the risk of disengagement or causing harm.

*We need to move from nil residency nil services to a system where those in need can access the services they need.*

Workshop participant

## **Co-design services with culturally diverse communities**

Services and programs need to be delivered in a variety of languages and through bilingual workers rather than just through translators.

*We need to acknowledge that not all CALD communities and those within those communities are analogous, and consider the diverse experience of Aboriginal Australians affected by domestic and family violence.*

Workshop participant

To ensure services and support are appropriate for diverse communities, appropriateness needs to be considered at the point of design not just delivery. While ensuring the community identifies with the person delivering the service is critical, it is not enough. The community needs to be engaged in and inform the design and tailoring of services for their community.

*Pathways need to be incremental.*  
Workshop participant

## **Accommodate a clients' individual journey**

The system must acknowledge that recovery is not a linear process, nor is it often made in leaps and bounds, but instead in small, sometimes repetitive steps. Programs and services must consider this in their design, to ensure those seeking support are not more demoralised by their inability to keep pace, creating further disengagement.

*Expectations need to be realistic and achievable, otherwise we are setting people up to fail.*  
Workshop participant

## **Outcome highlights**

- 6.1 Providing appropriate support to diverse victim-survivors
- 6.2 Undertaking authentic culturally and community informed service and program design and delivery
- 6.3 Developing programs and services to support people effectively at all stages of readiness



# Outcome 7: People have access to appropriate, safe and affordable housing

The issue of the need for more housing came up frequently during discussion, from emergency accommodation options for diverse clients to longer-term pathways to independent living.

## Provide accommodation that minimises risk and disruption

Access to appropriate and safe accommodation is critical for everyone seeking housing support, but some people have additional requirements to make something appropriate and safe. Their needs must be understood, and people should not be put into housing situations that risk further trauma or violence.

*We need greater brokerage options for our community. There just aren't enough LGBTIQ safe refuges and temporary accommodation options.*  
Workshop participant

The lack of available temporary and other supported housing across the state results in people, often victim-survivors, having to move away from support networks to access safe and secure housing. Strategies are required to avoid unnecessary movement and transience during a time of already significant change where safety can be ensured.

*The fact she had to move into the city, away from her community, to get services and supported housing is ridiculous.*  
Workshop participant

## Ensure support towards independent living

Many people affected by domestic and family violence desire independent living. It is, however, crucial to provide transitional support for those who have not lived independently before, or do not have other required skills, to ensure they can live safely and healthily.

*We need to provide more independent living options rather than shared refuges to increase the safety and security of those needing help.*  
Workshop participant

## Outcome highlights

- 7.1 Ensuring the availability of housing and accommodation options that are safe and appropriate for diverse clients
- 7.2 Increasing availability of housing in the communities where people feel safe, connected and supported
- 7.3 Supporting transition to independent living

# Outcome 8: People have support from a capable and empathetic workforce

**If we can build understanding of domestic and family violence and associated trauma in the workforce, workers will be less likely to judge, make assumptions about and cause unintentional harm to clients seeking help.**

Educating and informing the workforce about the diverse people and communities affected by domestic and family violence make them better at understanding their varied needs and challenges.

*We don't hire anyone with men's behaviour change experience—they just don't exist. No one has the skills ... we need so we have to carry a new staff member for 12 months before they're ready to run the program.*  
Workshop participant

## **Building trust and capacity**

Building familiarity and trusting relationships and connections between services and community organisations and the communities themselves can create greater understanding and capacity, enhancing servicing and support, especially in regional, rural and Aboriginal communities.

Effectively supporting people affected by domestic and family violence depends on having a workforce with specialised skills and experience. Education and training should build relevant capabilities to fill key skill gaps across the system.

*We need to help organisations upskill and develop content for other services ... so we can be confident to make referrals to them.*  
Workshop participant

While good quality training and capability building is available, implementation is patchy and will be an ongoing challenge. There is also concern that the specialist domestic and family violence workforce is ageing and there is a need to pass on skills and knowledge transfer. There is value in building a community of practice to help create a culture of peer support and development.

*Some new staff don't know basic field skills for dealing with risky situations—things like how to safely park a car or how to enter a room.*  
Workshop participant

Working with domestic and family violence is challenging. While there is a need to encourage people into the workforce, those working within the system should also have the support they need to manage their own mental health and wellbeing.

*We deal with so much. We have to help each other to look after our own mental health.*  
Workshop participant

## **Empower and support our staff**

Initiatives like FACS' previous White Ribbon Workforce Accreditation can empower frontline staff. Communities needs to project that domestic and family violence is unacceptable, and that staff and organisational structures are united.

This is a challenging sector with a dedicated workforce. Initiatives to uplift and to celebrate this dedication could also provide a way of ensuring basic standards within the practice. The expansion of the NSW Practice Framework across Communities would be a promising step, recognising existing good practice can also help to build and improve the sector.

## **Outcome highlights**

- 8.1 Increasing understanding of domestic and family violence and associated trauma in relevant departmental staff and government-funded services, including the court system
- 8.2 Developing cultural and community competency of relevant departmental staff and government-funded services
- 8.3 Building trusted relationships between government and government-funded services and community organisations
- 8.4 Ensuring education and training are building the skills and experience the system needs
- 8.5 Improving knowledge-sharing between experienced and new service and support workers, and across services and organisations
- 8.6 Encouraging capable support workers to come into the system and supporting them to stay
- 8.7 Ensuring that our staff can recognise the complexity of domestic and family violence and to be sensitive when dealing with people interacting with services
- 8.8 Signalling that Communities stands against domestic and family violence
- 8.9 Building a community of practice

# Outcome 9: Services coordinate and collaborate to deliver shared outcomes

**Where services do not coordinate someone's supports, the journey can be more complicated, especially at key transition points, like from youth to adult services. The risk is that they will not receive the services they need.**

Better connections and coordination of services are needed to support people effectively over their journey. Enhanced pathways would ensure people get access to support they need and achieve better outcomes.

*Small tweaks to the system can help improve collaboration—use of consistent practice frameworks, tools, etc.*  
Workshop participant

Communities' approach to funding services and support in the system needs to discourage protectionism. To facilitate collaboration to deliver shared outcomes requires innovative funding models that encourage services to work together to develop programs and support people over their journey through the system.

*I shouldn't have to call around service to service to find the one person who knows the service history of this woman.*  
Workshop participant

## **Clients do not need to repeat their stories**

Repeating the story is frustrating and traumatic, and distracts from providing services. Information sharing to enhance collective service impact and understanding while protecting individuals' safety and privacy would have a significant impact on the system's effectiveness.

Data drives everything in the system, so it should provide an accurate picture. To improve the quality and richness of information, good practices around collection and sharing need to be enhanced.

## **Collaborative service delivery is a priority**

For people to be effectively supported over their journey, they need help to transition from one service or stage of servicing to another. Improved service transition will help ensure people are not in the system or fall out completely because they didn't know where to go next. The developing of geographic and age-based service transition pathways and plans are particularly important.

*We need to support people to ensure they don't lose a service when they are forced to move.*  
Workshop participant

Effective coordination relies on trust. Efforts need to be made to rebuild trust between non-government and government services so they understand what they can and can't expect from one another, and can feel confident they are working towards the same outcome.

Even service providers lack understanding of child protection and its role. It is essential to build understanding and trust across the system of what child protection does and doesn't do, and how to work towards the best outcomes for the child.

Domestic and family violence exists everywhere, but services do not. Consistency of servicing outcomes needs to be improved, allowing for different service approaches across the state so everyone can access services when and where they need them.

## **Outcome highlights**

- 9.1 Designing a true service system rather than a collection of independent and siloed services
- 9.2 Developing funding models which enable and incentivise collaboration in communities and across services to deliver shared outcomes
- 9.3 Enabling information-sharing which builds trust in the system and reduces burdens on those seeking support
- 9.4 Enhancing data collection and helping service providers gain from the information and data they provide
- 9.5 Streamlining transition between services through connected pathways
- 9.6 Improving clarity of expectations and trust between Communities and service providers
- 9.7 Improving relationships between child protection and service providers and community to ensure removal is the last option
- 9.8 Enhancing consistency of servicing across the state