



Domestic Violence Services for People with Disability

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People with Disability Australia

- PWDA is a national and state peak disability rights and advocacy organisation
- PWDA is an organisation of, and for, all people with disability, and has as its major aims empowerment and promotion of the rights of people with disability and the creation of a society in which people with disability can fully participate

Domestic Violence NSW

- Domestic Violence NSW is the peak, statewide representative body for a diverse range of specialist domestic and family violence services in New South Wales
- Operating from a feminist, social justice perspective DV NSW works to improve the spectrum of policy, legislative and program responses to domestic and family violence (DFV) and to eliminate DFV through leadership in advocacy, partnerships and the promotion of good practice

Conceptualising Disability

- Medical Model (outdated): Understands disability to mean a loss, lack or deficit in function
- Social Model: Situates disability as arising from a number of disabling environmental, social and attitudinal barriers, which result in unequal access, exclusion and discrimination
- People with disability are not more vulnerable to violence on the basis of their impairment/s, but as a result of these barriers and inequalities

Disability and Violence

- Women with disability are approximately 37.3% more at risk of domestic violence than their peers (The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009)
- In NSW, 43% of the women who experienced personal violence in 2011 were estimated to have a disability or long-term health condition. This is 7% higher than the national average (ABS via Women NSW)
- This means that many of your current and past clients have disability, whether or not your service has recognised them

Domestic Violence and Disability

- Definitions of domestic violence don't always take account of where and how people with disability experience violence
- NSW legislation – the Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 leads Australia in including relationships and settings which people with disability are more likely to experience
- Yet this is often not recognised in practice, by police and by services of all kinds

Domestic and Family Violence

People with disability may experience domestic and family violence in unique ways:

- **Physical violence** can include using physical restraints, removing disability-related equipment or withholding of food, water, medication or support services
- **Sexual violence** can include taking control of reproductive processes, demanding sexual acts or inappropriate touching during care giving
- **Emotional violence** can include humiliation, manipulation, verbal abuse, forced isolation, or threatening institutionalisation, the cessation of care, or violence against the individual or their loved ones
- **Financial violence** can include stealing money, refusing to pay for medication or disability related equipment or taking control of money or investments

Domestic and Family Violence

- The usual (and historical) focus of domestic and family violence is on intimate partner violence
- Yet violence within the home takes many more forms, occurs in many more relationships, and can be just as if not more harmful than intimate partner violence
- It is a problem if our limited understanding of what constitutes domestic violence limits who we provide responses to, or of what those responses can consist

Settings

- There are many settings in which people with disability may experience domestic violence
- These include mainstream and disability-specific institutions, such as:
 - Private home
 - Public housing
 - Boarding houses
 - Residential institutions
 - Group homes
 - Out of home care
 - Disability services

Relationships with Perpetrators

People with disability may experience violence at the hands of, among others:

- Intimate partners
- Family members
- Carers – both formal and informal
- Staff in residential institutions
- Other residents in residential institutions
- Disability support workers

Barriers to Disclosure 1

People with disability face further barriers:

- Being reliant on their perpetrator for the ongoing provision of support
- Being reliant on a perpetrator to be able to make a complaint or report
- Being constantly monitored by the perpetrator, giving them no opportunities to report (including at the doctor, one of few occasions they may interact with someone outside their domestic setting)
- Not being believed by others, including other formal or informal support workers, services, or police officers
- Not having others understand the level of threat they face, especially where the perpetrator is also a primary support

Barriers to Disclosure 2

- Being afraid of losing custody of their children to their abuser or to Child Protection
- Being unaware of the support services available to them (especially where disability services are unaware of DFV services in the area)
- Fearing forced institutionalisation, especially if the perpetrator is an informal source of support
- Fearing the loss of support services or financial assistance
- Having literally nowhere to go due to:
 - The lack of accessible and affordable housing, or
 - Having no accessible refuges to escape violence in, or
 - Their current residence may have been modified specifically for their needs, or
 - There being too few vacancies in residential settings (which can also mean perpetrators who are co-residents in group homes are not moved)

Increasing Accessibility

- Increasing accessibility of DFV services is essential
- It might not be as straightforward as merely adding a ramp, but it's not impossible!
- Ensuring equity of accessibility might mean:
 - Changes to how information is written, published and dispersed
 - Changes to the physical environment, which may involve large scale, permanent alterations or a minor rearranging of furniture
 - Changes to the attitudes of board and staff members, ensuring that women with disability are respected, believed and included
 - Changes to governance, procedures and guidelines to ensure that policies are as inclusive as practices
 - Changes to how services think about who their stakeholders and partners are, or who is in their Community of Practice

Women with Disability and Domestic and Family Violence

- Partnership between DV NSW and PWDA, drawing on national and international expertise regarding best practice in responding to domestic and family violence against people with disability
- We wanted to increase the accessibility of domestic and family violence services in NSW
- The main objective was to provide the tools for these services to make tangible, enduring changes to increase their accessibility through cross-sector collaboration

Women with Disability and Domestic and Family Violence

Key output was a set of three resources:

1. A Guide for Policy and Practice
2. Creating a Disability Action Plan (including an audit)
3. Practical Recommendations

This resource is **FREE** to download:

<http://pwd.org.au/issues/policy-and-practice-guide.html>

A Guide for Policy and Practice

- Provides further detail and background about disability, gender and domestic and family violence
- Discusses intersecting gender- and disability-based discrimination
- Outlines the forms of discrimination women with disability often experience when trying to gain access to DFV services
- Provides background on the difficulties and barriers to seeking assistance experienced by women with disability
- Highlights four barriers in further detail:
 - Inaccessible Information and Communication
 - Physical Inaccessibility
 - Organisational Attitudes and Experience
 - Perceived Discrimination

Creating a Disability Action Plan

Guidelines for performing an audit of the service, covering:

- Physical accessibility outside the service
- Physical accessibility inside the service
- Accessibility of print information
- Accessibility of electronic information
- Accessibility of information at the service
- Attitudinal accessibility of the service
- Procedural accessibility of the service

Practical Recommendations for Domestic and Family Violence Services

Recommendations divided into three stages, setting realistic timeframes and helping with long-term planning

Stage 1: Changes are quite minor and straightforward such as:

- Rearranging furniture to enable wheelchair access
- Electronic information available in DOC/HTML formats
- Disability Awareness training for staff

Practical Recommendations for Domestic and Family Violence Services

Stage 2: Modifications need more planning and resources including:

- Tactile ground surface indicators installed
- Ensure your website adheres to WCAG accessibility standards
- Develop Easy English brochures and information sheets
- Modify recruitment policies to ensure full inclusivity
- Building networks with disability service providers

Stage 3: Significant infrastructural changes such as:

- Ensure physical access to buildings abides by Livable Housing Australia standards
- Create introductory DVD for clients of your service
- Develop a new DAP as part of each new Strategic Plan for your service, ensuring adequate governance and oversight

Further Information

Women with Disability and Domestic and Family Violence Resources:

<http://pwd.org.au/issues/policy-and-practice-guide.html>

PWDA's ongoing work in Violence Prevention:

<http://pwd.org.au/issues/preventing-violence.html>

End the Violence Campaign:

<https://endtheviolence.good.do/etv/tellyourlocalmp/>

WWDA's Stop the Violence Project:

<http://stvp.org.au>