

## **No woman left in danger: addressing the family violence crisis**

Right now Australia is in the midst of a family violence crisis. The horrifying rate of women murdered by current or former partners in the past year shines a light on the urgent need to improve the family violence response system, and to invest in programs to prevent violence in the future.

The statistics are stark. The latest data from Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) shows 81,900 women have wanted to leave a current partner who has used violence, but never have. Further, 1 in 12 women indicated that after escaping their abusive partner; they returned, in whole or in part because they had nowhere else to go. What's more, amongst those who have been able to successfully escape their abusive partner, seven out of ten have had to leave property or assets behind when separating from their former partner. ANROWS estimate that one in four women in Australia have experienced one or more incidents of violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this crisis, insufficient resources mean that thousands of women are unable to access the support they need to live free from danger.

To safely escape an abusive partner, access to service support is critical. When a woman tries to escape her abuser she is exposed to increased danger – as abusers often escalate control, use violence for the first time, or increase their level of violence in response - sometimes murdering their former partner.

The current funding approach is leaving women and their children in significant danger. Critical parts of the service safety net do not have the funding they need to keep up with demand. What's more, demand for these services is increasing above the already unmet levels. Experts expect that the increased media attention on family violence will lead more women to try and escape their abusers and therefore continue to further increase demand into the future.

The recent Women's Safety Package announcement from the Turnbull government is welcomed, but vital services still remain dramatically under-resourced. Fair Agenda's 35,000 strong community urge the government to commit full funding for the services needed to prevent and respond to family violence.

The attached report draws on key experts' best estimates of the federal funding needed to enable key family violence related services to help keep women live free from abuse. It has been informed by: Domestic Violence Victoria, National Association of Community Legal Centres, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and No To Violence.

Fair Agenda members have been, and will continue to, organise in their communities to demonstrate public support for full funding of these services, in the lead up to the federal budget and election.

---

<sup>1</sup> Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, *Violence against women: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey 2012*, released October 2015.

# 1. Family and Domestic Violence Specialist Services

Specialist women's family and domestic violence (FDV) services are the critical pillar of any response to family violence. They provide:

- a unique, specialist understanding of the nature and dynamics of family and domestic violence;
- a safe space for women and children living with family violence; and
- a set of programs critical to supporting women to achieve safety, including: outreach, counselling, group therapy, financial support, and support to remain safely at home.

These services also have specialist, sophisticated skills in the assessment and management of risk, and work closely with police and legal services to keep women and their children safe from further violence.

Current inadequate funding levels mean that FDV services across Australia are struggling to meet current levels of demand. For example, in Victoria police now respond to 70,000 incidents a year. That's a 70% increase over 5 years. In the same period, the specialist services needed to support women referred from incidents have only received a sliver of additional funding. What's more, inadequate and insecure funding limits the capacity of specialist agencies to respond to the urgent and ongoing needs of women and children affected by family and domestic violence. Current funding levels are leaving women and their children in danger.

The national alliance representing family and domestic violence experts and services is calling for:

- 1) a national partnership agreement for the Prevention of Violence Against Women between the Commonwealth and state governments to ensure guaranteed, sustainable and dedicated funding for this essential work, and
- 2) Investment in of the essential work of specialist family and domestic violence services to expand their capacity to meet the needs of women, children and communities.

## **The importance of guaranteed, sustainable and dedicated funding**

Inadequate and insecure funding of FDV services has created a system that is largely crisis-driven with limited capacity for vital (and cost-effective) early intervention and long-term work with clients. Further, there is a lack of recognition about the unique skills of FDV workers and the specialist supports that victim-survivors of violence and trauma require immediately and for longer-term recovery. To remedy this, the entire funding system for these services must be re-imagined to reflect the actual scale of this deeply entrenched social problem.

The existing funding arrangements are a reflection of historical and out-dated views of FDV — a legacy of when it was considered a private and temporary problem; an issue dealt with by 'women's refuges' alone. Now the nature, scale and impacts on women and children's lives are better understood and FDV is recognised as a serious, complex and pervasive social problem. Yet funding for FDV services continues to come mainly through homelessness programs – wrongly treating women and children experiencing FDV simply a cohort of a broader group of homeless Australians.

Funding FDV services through homelessness programs means that this funding is hidden in the homelessness budget and is difficult to identify and track. It also means that services' funding is based on homelessness prevention targets. Right now, most of the services delivered by specialist FDV agencies – outreach and support, intensive case management, legal support and advocacy – are not necessarily captured or measured and have never been adequately funded.

While governments at times make additional funding available on an ad hoc basis (for example Prime Minister Turnbull's recent Women's Safety Package), projects are often funded on a short term or pilot basis, without administration costs built in. While extra resources are useful, project funding is not a sustainable basis for the vital work that FDV services do

In order to most effectively and efficiently support women to escape abuse and live free from danger, specialist FDV services requires funding that:

- is secure, sustainable, transparent and accountable
- is commensurate with the level of demand and services needed
- guarantees specialist FDV services can perform their core business, including crisis response and outreach services, early intervention and post-crisis support for women and children
- enables specialist FDV services to attract and retain a specialised, skilled workforce with appropriate conditions, salary rates, and professional development and career progression opportunities
- supports comprehensive and effective federal and state-wide governance structures for the FDV system
- ensures the experiences of women and their children are used to inform and improve systemic responses
- includes effective perpetrator accountability including responsive police and justice systems and accredited men's behaviour change programs.

### The importance of investment in the capacity of specialist FDV services

Specialist FDV services provide a unique and highly specialised response to those seeking help. Workers are trained in a practice model that is informed by sophisticated knowledge of the gendered nature, dynamics, impacts and long-term consequences of FDV. This specialist training and knowledge ensures specialist services are able to provide comprehensive risk assessment and safety planning with women. Assessing risk 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. FDV services provide specialist case management, in line with the level of risk posed by the perpetrator, the changing nature of risk over time, and the specifics of her situation. This specialist support is critical for addressing the immediate trauma experienced by women affected by violence, and critical to their long term recovery.

Specialist FDV services provide critical information, crisis support and accommodation, support and advocacy to assist women to navigate the justice, legal, housing and income support systems. They may provide outreach support to women in the community, in their own homes or elsewhere who are not in a crisis situation but who require counselling, access to other support services for health, alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues, financial capability and legal support. As well as supporting them to navigate the complex FDV system, FDV workers – women's advocates – also

advocate for women across systems and identify systemic gaps and barriers for continuous quality improvement.

Working with women and children experiencing FDV is a complex, dynamic and sensitive process. The characteristics of FDV are unique: women and children live with fear and trauma 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 also common for perpetrators to isolate women and children from family and friends. Women from all walks of life are equally at risk of experiencing FDV, 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 accessible, culturally safe and appropriate services is critical.

## 2. Family and Relationship Services

Family and relationship services include Family Relationship Centres, Children's Contact Centres, Parenting Order programs and some family violence support programs including counselling and group work - and can be the first channel that women and their children use to try and access support when someone is using abusive and controlling behaviour.

Thus they can play an important role in identifying where violence and abuse is occurring - identifying women and children at risk of violence, supporting them with their safety, and are in a critical position to identify and prevent risks of future homicides. As they usually work with the whole of the family, they can also play a critical role in holding men accountable for their use of violence and sharing risk-relevant information with a broader range of services in the family violence system.

Currently inadequate funding for these services mean they aren't able to meet demand and have waiting lists in excess of 3 months, which means opportunities for early intervention before violence occurs are often lost.

*What federal funding is needed?*

*Family and Relationship Services Australia conservatively estimate they need an additional \$47 million per annum to meet the current levels of demand across their service, including but not limited to those related to family violence.*

### 3. Legal assistance services

For those trying to escape a violent abuser, access to free legal advice and assistance is critical. A woman seeking to escape her abuser will often need to establish where she stands with family law, including how she'll be able to keep her children safe; how she'll be able to access shared funds or property; and if she'll be able to escape a web of debts and loans that might have been put in her name by her abuser. A number of legal assistance providers help women experiencing family violence, including community legal centres and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services.

#### Community legal centres (CLCs)

Community legal centres provide vital free legal help and related assistance to people experiencing or escaping family violence. Family violence-related work is one of the top two specialist areas in which CLCs provide assistance across Australia.

CLCs provide advice and assistance to women affected by family violence across a range of areas of law they have to navigate to safely separate from their abuser and get on the pathway to a life free from danger - including family violence (AVOs), family law, child protection, tenancy, employment, and credit and debt related matters (as financial abuse is often a prominent feature of family violence).

Without the support and assistance of CLCs, a woman experiencing abuse may not have the legal information she needs to protect her children, and have to face the additional trauma of facing her abuser in court alone - things that often become additional barriers to escaping an abuser.

CLCs also do crucial early intervention and prevention work. Unfortunately, some of this work, in particular policy and systemic reform work focused on improving the way the legal system works for those who've had to endure family violence (which helps reduce demand for other support services), has been limited by Commonwealth Government funding restrictions.

Alarming, centres are currently unable to respond to even the demand for their services – with data from 92 of the 200 centres across Australia showing turn away figures in excess of 159,220 people in 2014/15. This is a conservative figure and means hundreds of thousands of women are missing out on the legal help they need. Experts expect demand will continue to increase – which means thousands more women will not be able to access the legal assistance they need to live safely.

#### *What federal funding is needed?*

*Under the National partnership on Legal Assistance Services, CLCs are facing a 30% cut (\$12.1 million) in Commonwealth funding nationally from 2017 onwards. These cuts will have a disastrous impact on CLCs' ability to provide services – including to women trying to escape family violence and dwarf the small amount of funding provided to CLCs under the Women's Safety Package. There is a need to immediately reverse the national funding cuts to CLCs under the National Partnership Agreement (amounting to \$34.83 million between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2020).*

*To meet existing unmet demand for services, in December 2014 the Productivity Commission recommended \$200 million in additional funding be immediately injected into legal assistance services. The Commission recommended the federal government should be responsible for 60% of this funding - \$120 million annually. The National Association of Community Legal Centres are calling on the Commonwealth Government to immediately inject \$120 million per year into the legal assistance sector, consistent with the recommendation made by the Productivity Commission, including at a minimum \$14.4 million per year to CLCs.*

## **Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS)**

A critical component of legal support is the provision of culturally safe and specialist legal services for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples – who are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific legal assistance services are a particularly crucial resource because Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people experiencing family violence are often reluctant to disclose violence or seek assistance from the police or mainstream legal services. This occurs for a range of complex reasons, including the legacy of the stolen generations, high incarceration rates and the devastating rates of deaths in custody and the high rates of child removal – an issue inextricably linked with family violence.

Further, mainstream legal services cannot always offer the cultural setting in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel comfortable seeking help, nor are they aware of the complexity of kinship systems and community pressure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must navigate if they are to leave a violent relationship.

The Indigenous Legal Needs Project conducted across Australia between 2011-14 found that there was significant unmet legal assistance need among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially in relation to family violence issues. Specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal assistance services are critical to addressing these needs – a conclusion backed by the Productivity Commission and Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales.

There are currently 14 FVPLS across Australia, and only in regional and remote locations, which means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing family violence in other locations don't have access to legal help from FVPLS who are best placed to provide culturally appropriate advice and assistance. There is a need to roll-out FVPLS across Australia to meet this significant unmet legal need and ensure proper access to services.

Funding for FVPLS has been frozen at 2013/14 levels, resulting in an effective cut of \$464,000 to services this year (\$1.4 million over three years). Further, the Indigenous Advancement Strategy introduced by Prime Minister Abbott in 2014 abolished the dedicated funding for FVPLS and other specialist family violence services for indigenous Australians. These critical services – supporting those affected by family violence to stay safe – are now forced to compete for funding with other equally important safety and wellbeing programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

*What federal funding is needed?*

*Reinstatement of the national Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Program's direct funding allocation of \$23 million. Further, at least \$28 million is needed to address geographic gaps in coverage of the FVPLS service.*

#### **4. Men's behaviour change programs**

Working with men who use violent and controlling behaviour is critical to preventing and minimising the harm of family violence. Men's behaviour change programs work towards the safety and well being of women and children by attempting to engage men who use violence on a transformative journey towards non-violence.

Right now demand for men's behaviour change programs is so high that men who are known to be at a high risk of using violence have to wait up to six months to even be assessed as eligible for a program. Once they are on a waiting list, the average wait is 3 months. Expanding reach and capacity of these programs is critical.

At the same time, investment in the capacity of service providers to deliver best practice programs is also vital. Men's behaviour change work is complex and challenging, and needs an accreditation system to ensure agencies delivering the service are working in line with best practice. Currently Australia has no accreditation system for community-based domestic violence perpetrator programs; an unusual situation for such a complex health and human services area.

*What federal funding is needed?*

*No To Violence are calling for \$4.5 million over 3 years to develop a national accreditation system for men's behaviour change programs.*

*They are also calling for \$25 million per year of Commonwealth funding, matched 1:1 by additional state and territory funding, to expand the number and reach of men's behaviour change programs, and to assist them to become ready for accreditation.*

A range of agencies have an important role to play in ensuring perpetrator accountability for family and domestic violence, but aren't yet supported to work effectively in this space.

*What federal funding is needed?*

*No To Violence are calling for \$1 million of investment in a series of national perpetrator accountability summits for police, corrections, courts, child protection and health service providers to meet (each drawing representatives from each Australian state and territory, and inviting relevant experts from overseas) to share best practice in how each of these sectors can work towards perpetrator accountability.*

To help address men's violence against women in Australia there is an opportunity and need for the federal government to invest in strengthening the ability of men's

behaviour change program providers to work with men as fathers, by funding a second stage program for men who have completed a men's behaviour change program to assist them to become safer fathers.

The delivery of these programs by accredited men's behaviour change providers is critical, as sending a family violence perpetrator to a generic parenting program can sometimes do more harm than good. For example, without a facilitator addressing a perpetrator's violence-supporting attitudes, an abusive father could use the additional understanding of parenting techniques gained in a generic parenting class to increase his control and manipulation of his children.

*What federal funding is needed?*

*No To Violence are calling for \$3 million per year additional investment from the federal government to assist men who have completed a first stage men's behaviour change program to complete second stage programs delivered by accredited men's behaviour change program providers to assist them to become safer fathers.*

The RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice report 'Opportunities for Early Intervention: Bringing perpetrators of family violence into view' outlines a range of promising evidence-based justice system initiatives to work with men at an earlier stage before their use of violence becomes entrenched. No To Violence are calling for funding to enable 30 multi-year projects across Australia so local specialist community experts can implement such interventions.

*What federal funding is needed?*

*\$22.5 million national grants program over 3 years to support community-based agencies to work with police, courts and other justice system stakeholders towards earlier intervention with domestic violence perpetrators.*

## **5. Primary prevention programs**

Primary prevention focuses on strategies to prevent violence before it occurs – a vital component of a whole of system, and whole of population approach to ending violence against women and their children. It involves challenging the deeply ingrained attitudes, social norms and gendered power inequalities that give rise to men's violence against women.

Changing these deeply entrenched drivers of violence can take years, if not generations, therefore long term funding at a level sufficient to affect change across the whole of our community is important. Achieving a significant reduction in violence against women will never be achieved 'project by project' – Australia needs a substantial scaling up and systematisation of primary prevention work in a coordinated way across settings and jurisdictions.

Our Watch, the national organisation established to drive the prevention of violence against women and their children is critical to the achievement of the broad, deep and long term cultural and structural changes that are needed, yet the organisation is currently only funded until June 2017.

### *What is needed?*

Longer term, core funding for Our Watch, at least until 2022, the final year of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*.

In addition, to ensure primary prevention work is delivered at the scale needed to affect community level change, increased investment in Our Watch is required to enable the implementation and roll out of the comprehensive nationwide approach to primary prevention specified in *Change the Story*. This includes implementation of 'on-the-ground' primary prevention activities in multiple settings, with multiple audiences, delivered at local and regional levels, as well as the development of the prevention 'infrastructure' necessary to provide coordination, oversight and quality assurance functions at both state/territory and federal levels. Within this broad framework, specific funding is required to enable:

- Expansion of best practice Respectful Relationships Education, to ensure every school, every student and every teacher is properly supported to receive this transformative education. While this work should be primarily state or territory funded, Commonwealth investment should also be made in quality assurance, safety, evaluation and coordination.
- Continuation and expansion of *The Line*, Australia's long-term initiative to build young people's capacity to develop healthy, safe and respectful relationships, and to reject violence against women. An increase in funding would enable *The Line* to continue to engage young people; address specific areas of concern for young people and their parents; reach young men at-risk of perpetrating or excusing violence; and implement tailored strategies to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- Resourcing community led work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as part of an action research project to identify effective and culturally appropriate strategies to prevent violence.
- Continuing programs focused on improving media reporting of violence against women, by engaging with the media in a positive way, outlining the harms and benefits associated with media representations of violence, and encouraging media professionals to show leadership and harness the power of the media towards the prevention of violence.
- Supporting local government to drive prevention activities at the community level through a national *Lighthouse Program*. Developed by Our Watch, a *Lighthouse Program* would provide expert and evidence based support to capital city local governments to drive their planning, implementation and monitoring of activity to prevent violence against women and their children.
- Investing in innovation and promising practice. This will ensure both that evidence-based prevention activities with proven prevention outcomes can be expanded and implemented across the country, and that new approaches and pilot activities are supported, particularly in settings where limited action has taken place to date (for example: advertising, popular culture, leisure and recreation, early childhood).

In order to facilitate this work, investment in building a workforce with expertise specifically in prevention (as distinct from response) is also needed. This is critical to ensure there are practitioners with relevant skills and understanding of best practice approaches to primary prevention, who can not only work with and advise government, but also lead local and regional prevention activities.