



Women's Electoral Lobby | 8-10 Victoria Street, Newtown, NSW 2042

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26 October 2015

Mr Andrew Barr
ACT Chief Minister
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
PO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Chief Minister

We write to ask you to support a proposal for long term secure Commonwealth/State (C/S) funding for women's refuges and related services at the 27 November Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting.

Many community and women's organisations have welcomed your Government's five key priorities for addressing domestic violence over the next two years and we want you to know how much we appreciate your commitment. We have also been very heartened by ACT Policing's initiative to dedicate two family violence and community teams to respond to domestic abuse. Women's Refuges save lives and are at the heart of the system of support for women and children fleeing domestic violence in Australia and that is why we are seeking your support for our proposal to establish long-term C/S funding for these services.

The Women's Refuges and Housing Program (WRAHP) proposal is for long term dedicated C/S funding for women's refuges, related services and transitional accommodation. We estimate WRAHP will cost \$1.982 billion over five years, and should be funded 50/50 by C/S. The Specialist Homelessness Services allocation under the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnership on Homelessness funding provide the start-up funding. These two programs are drawing to an end.

In recent years funding for women's refuges has been subsumed into general homelessness funding, which has failed to acknowledge or adequately support refuges for the complex homicide prevention work they provide. Escaping domestic violence is vastly different in character from general homelessness and requires specialised programs. It is a crisis situation, which with the specialist help provided by refuges may eventually see women and their children returning to their home and community.

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (“National Plan”), with its six planned outcomes, is an excellent blueprint for action. The focus of WRAHP is on Outcome Four: Services to meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence. Fatal and damaging domestic and family violence demands an immediate service response pending attitudinal and behavioural change from the other outcomes in the National Plan.

We have sent the proposal to the COAG Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children where it is under active consideration.

The COAG meeting on 27 November is an opportunity for you and other federal and state leaders show strong leadership on the national emergency of domestic and family violence. We do not need to remind you of the very high number of deaths of women and children from such violence already this year. If you endorse the WRAHP proposal you will be taking an important and much needed step towards ensuring women and their children needing to escape violence will find a safe haven through a refuge and its programs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Helen L'Orange'.

Helen L'Orange AM

Convenor, WEL Violence Against Women Action Group

cc: Ms Yvette Berry, Minister for Women

Attachments:

1. The Women's Refuges and Housing Program (WRAHP) Proposal
2. The Women's Refuges and Housing Program (WRAHP) Draft Bill