



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

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## **Briefing Note**

**7 June 2016**

### **1. Proposal framework**

The **Women and Children's Safety Program (WCSP)** has been developed by the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) as a framework for the future funding of refuges and associated services. The framework assumes adequate funds from Commonwealth and State governments to replace the current funding provided under national homelessness programs. It is now apparent that services providing for the complex needs of women and children escaping domestic violence do not belong with homelessness policy. In any event, the homelessness programs will end in 2017 and new arrangements need to be in place by then.

The new framework for funding women's refuges assumes a national program to provide 24 hour accessible front line, integrated support services for women and accompanying children who are in crisis and may be at risk of further injury or even death. The services to be funded would comprise proven strategies for assisting women and children in crisis in addition to evidence-based innovative approaches capable of supplementing emergency support with giving women tools for rebuilding their future. These could include services enabling women to stay in or return to their homes. WCSP proposes attaching a 'Safe at Home Program' to every Refuge where no other local program exists.

The WCSP framework has the capacity to support a much needed highly integrated systems approach. All relevant agencies, including child protection, police, legal services, family law, and health, need to be included for an integrated cross-sectoral system to work.

The proposal for WCSP is being supported by 34 Organisations, including Chief Executive Women, Women on Boards, White Ribbon Australia, the National Rural Women's Coalition, Australian Women's Health Network, National Foundation for Australian Women, and the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children

The Prime Minister and all state Premiers and Chief Ministers have been briefed on the proposal, as has the COAG Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children.

### **2. The evolution of Women's Refuges Services**

Refuges have been evolving their services since they were first established in the 1970s and are now able to deliver an integrated response to domestic violence.

Refuges aim to provide 24-hour accessible front line crisis support services and safe housing pathways and solutions.

The wide range of case management work provided by refuges includes:

- Information, advocacy and support-champions to help navigate the system with their knowledge of best services and professionals
- Risk assessments, safety planning, security upgrades so women can return home safely
- Court support
- Referrals to trusted professionals experienced and skilled in providing financial advice services and legal services
- Education and job seeking skills; preparing women for employment or helping women retain their jobs including through access to leave entitlements
- Health services (including mental health services to address trauma) and partnering with Women's Health Centres
- Children's support workers/child care
- Pet care
- Driver education
- Income support advice and help with Centrelink
- Brokerage including covering urgent bills; education and training
- Counselling including group work and personal development assistance
- Linkages to local communities e.g. via local Domestic Violence Liaison Committees

Refuge workers also conduct early intervention and prevention programs. Refuges outreach and community education work helps women to identify abuse and seek help for instance in helping woman understand that financial abuse and social isolation abuse are part of the spectrum of power and control behaviours associated with domestic and family violence. Examples of prevention programs delivered by refuges in local schools are 'Love Bites' and Respectful Relationships.

### **3. Evidence Base For Women's Refuges**

In developing the WCSP framework, WEL reviewed research on the effectiveness of refuges/shelters/safehouses in preventing re-abuse and identified the work of Irene Jonker as being the largest Meta-analysis currently available (Jonker et al., 2014).

The analysis searched 5 databases from January 1985 through to July 2011 for original research articles evaluating the effects of interventions provided to women during and after shelter accommodation. A total 726 women (375 intervention participants and 351 control) were included in the analysis. The analysis found that refuge interventions were effective in improving mental health outcomes, in decreasing abuse and improving social outcomes. Participants in the study did not receive any additional services than is usual from the shelter/refuge. The study did not compare different interventions or the cost effectiveness.

Alternative models centred around, for example legal services, are emerging and deserve careful evaluation to ensure they can match the proven record of women’s refuges in delivering a safe integrated service.

Services that operate without women’s refuge accommodation are finding this absence problematic. For some women going home is not an option. A motel room is not enough for a woman in crisis and making major life decisions. *Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness: A Synthesis report* (Tually et al., 2008) reported

*‘Refuges or shelters as they are sometimes called are a vital SAAP funded accommodation option within the domestic and family violence sector. Demand for places within shelters continues to outstrip supply, and by a considerable amount.*

*The role of these services has changed considerably over time. Shelters have developed from small scale services (some were just a single building, house or flat) to what are now often ‘a complex set of administrative arrangements, buildings, support and housing arrangements’ (Weeks & Oberin 2004, p. 24).*

#### 4. A funding model for WCSP

As a starting point the WCSP proposal suggests existing C/S homelessness funding. WEL has taken into account AIHW and Commonwealth Budget papers data to reach an estimate \$1,982m over 5 years of commonwealth and state funding.

WEL applied **30%** of the overall funding (based on the AIHW Specialised Homelessness Services Annual Reports) .These reports consistently show approximately 30% of clients requesting services from SHS nominated domestic violence as their primary reason for seeking housing assistance.

#### Funding estimate

2016-17 \$m*	2017-18 \$m**	2018-19 \$m**	2019-20 \$m**	2020-21 \$m**	Total \$m
287	315.7	378.84	454.608	545.5296	1,982
\$219m+ \$ 68m	10%increase	20% increase	20% increase	20%increase	rounded

\*Some funds will be available from commitments for National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH).

\*\* 20% increase in years 3, 4, 5 reflects capacity of program to deliver increased services effectively. Beyond year 5 the capital component will decline.

N.B.The Commonwealth Government’s Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) report issued in December 2015 has no homelessness funds for 2017-2018

[http://budget.gov.au/2015-16/content/myefo/html/08\\_attachment\\_d\\_annex\\_a-02.htm#A5](http://budget.gov.au/2015-16/content/myefo/html/08_attachment_d_annex_a-02.htm#A5)