

# ACTION TO END GENDERED VIOLENCE.

## Action to End Gendered Violence

A Safe State for New South Wales

The New South Wales Women's Alliance  
2023 Election Platform

## About the New South Wales Women's Alliance

The New South Wales Women's Alliance is an alliance of peak organisations and state-wide, specialist service providers responding to and working to prevent sexual, domestic, and family violence. Our vision is for a world where there is no sexual violence, domestic, or family violence. Membership of the NSW Women's Alliance includes:

- [Domestic Violence NSW](#)
- [Women's Legal Service NSW](#)
- [Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Service](#)
- [Muslim Women Australia](#)
- [Older Women's Network NSW](#)
- [Women's Health NSW](#)
- [Immigrant Women's Speakout Association NSW](#)
- [Full Stop Australia](#)
- [ACON Health Ltd \(LGBTQ+\)](#)
- [No To Violence](#)
- [People with Disability Australia \(NSW\)](#)
- [NSW Council of Social Service \(NCOSS\)](#)
- [Seniors Rights Service](#)
- [Youth Action](#)

## Acknowledgement

The NSW Women's Alliance acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the breadth and depth of Australia, and the elders past and present. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived and cared for Country for over 65,000 years and continue to do so, honouring ancestors and knowledge holders within community, and observing ancient cultural practices.

We recognise the impacts of colonisation and the ongoing systemic racism and oppression that is still present within institutions and the broader community. We acknowledge the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and hold their stories with great care.

We concede that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are at the highest risk of sexual, domestic, and family violence compared with other women in Australia. We acknowledge that domestic and family violence are not part of Aboriginal culture.

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## Executive Summary

Every person in NSW has the right to be safe and to live free from violence. This includes children and young people, people of all genders and identities, people from all backgrounds and cultures, and all abilities and ages. The devastating reality is that not everyone in Australia or NSW lives free from violence: numbers of domestic violence assaults have increased annually in the past five years (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research [BOCSAR], 2021a) and sexual violence cases are the fastest growing crime reported in NSW, increasing by 21% in 2021 (BOCSAR, 2021b). The numbers of people accessing homelessness services for support due to domestic violence has also been steadily growing (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2021).

The cost of violence against women and their children is estimated to be over \$26 billion each year, with the cost to NSW estimated to be \$6.02 billion (KPMG, 2016). Investing in preventing gendered violence and intervening early will reduce this cost and the health burden to our communities. We can address this important health issue by supporting women, children and LGBTIQ+ victim-survivors in their long-term recovery in the aftermath of violence. We need action to respond early to stop violence occurring again, intervening when there are early warning signs of sexual, domestic, and family violence, and preventing violence from occurring in the first place by addressing known root causes or drivers (Webster, 2016).

The NSW Women's Alliance is a collective of peak bodies and state-wide specialist services. As specialists in this field with experience in service delivery, policy reform and research, we call on all parties to take action to end gendered violence by committing to seven priorities in the 2023 election:

1. A coordinated, whole-of-government approach to sexual, domestic, and family violence policy in NSW.
2. Commit to intersectional primary prevention to end gendered violence and promote gender equality.
3. Immediate and long-term supports for people experiencing and recovering from sexual, domestic, and family violence
4. Safe and appropriate housing for everybody experiencing and recovering from sexual, domestic, and family violence.
5. Reform legal systems and policing for people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence.
6. Enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to lead change towards ending sexual, domestic, and family violence in their communities.

7. Develop and implement a workforce development plan for the specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector.

This document offers thorough detail of the policy initiatives recommended within each of the broader asks. Achieving a safe state requires adequate and ongoing funding to resource specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence services, who support those recovering from violence and abuse to stay safe, thrive, and to hold perpetrators meaningfully accountable.

With commitment and action, we can end gendered violence and make NSW a safer state for everyone.

# Seven priorities for Action to End Gendered Violence

## **1. A coordinated, whole-of-government approach to sexual, domestic, and family violence policy in NSW**

The current approach to the prevention of sexual, domestic, and family violence is siloed across NSW Government, being the remit of over 7 departments and as many NSW government strategies. The NSW Women's Alliance is calling for an integrated approach with parliamentary oversight. Additionally, we call for a lived expertise advisory group to the NSW Government, increased transparency, quality standards for specialist services and a whole-of-government risk assessment framework.

## **2. Commit to intersectional primary prevention approaches to end gendered violence and promote gender equality**

Violence against women is preventable, and gender inequality is well-established to be the key driver of sexual, domestic, and family violence. The NSW Women's Alliance are calling for a NSW Primary Prevention of sexual, domestic, and family violence plan committed to an intersectional approach, with a minimum of \$10 million per year dedicated to delivering respectful relationships education and a minimum of \$10 million per year dedicated to other evidence-based primary prevention initiatives under the plan.

## **3. Immediate and long-term supports for people experiencing and recovering from sexual, domestic, and family violence**

Fund crisis, early intervention and longer-term supports so that people experiencing and recovering from sexual, domestic, and family violence have resources they need. The NSW Women's Alliance is calling for an increase in funding to the specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector by a minimum of \$133.55 million per year. Introduction of flexible support packages so that victim-survivors have flexible access to money they need to access safety, and an increase in funding for specialist children's and young people's services. We call for all 55 recommendations from the Respect@Work report to be implemented in NSW.

## **4. Safe and appropriate housing for everybody experiencing and recovering from sexual, domestic, and family violence**

Sexual, domestic, and family violence is the single largest driver of homelessness for women and children. The NSW Women's Alliance want to ensure all victim-survivors of domestic, and family violence, no matter their age, background or income, can access a safe home. We are calling for the NSW Government to fund long-term, safe housing, including \$2,6 billion annually for 5000 new social housing dwellings per year to house the

tens of thousands of people on wait lists. The NSW Women's Alliance is also calling on the NSW Government to increase transitional housing by 50% and to increase the amount of affordable housing in new developments.

## **5. Reform legal systems and policing for people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence**

Women, children and young people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence are more likely to have multiple and complex legal issues. The NSW Women's Alliance are calling for improvements to policing which ensure people experiencing violence can access consistent and safe responses anywhere in NSW, and a safe, phased and transparent approach to implementing coercive control legislation. We call for the NSW Government to fund improvements to courts, so they are safer for people who have experienced sexual, domestic, and family violence and for increased access, transparency and accountability to the Victims Support Scheme.

## **6. Enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to lead change towards ending sexual, domestic, and family violence in their communities**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience domestic and family violence three times the rate of non-Indigenous women, violence can be more severe with hospitalisation over 30x as frequent and sexual assault at least three times more likely. The ongoing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, in addition to gendered factors, drive violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The NSW Women's Alliance supports recommendations from the Domestic Violence NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Steering committee to support self-determination, and seek the expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to design responses which will achieve successful outcomes in Aboriginal communities. Other recommendations include increased accountability and transparency of government actions and policing and a Truth and Justice Commission in NSW.

## **7. Develop and implement a workforce development plan for the specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector.**

One in four workers in community service organisations in NSW are aged 55 or over and approximately half of the staff will be of retirement age by 2027. The COVID 19 pandemic has further exacerbated the issues behind an under-resourced sector, as demand has increased while workers have been stretched thin, facing a high risk of burnout. The NSW Women's Alliance is calling for a thorough workforce development plan incorporating the training needs of the current sector as well as increasing the number of trained staff, including people with lived expertise and Aboriginal specialist workers.

## **Terminology:**

### **Domestic violence**

Interpersonal violence or abuse perpetrated by an intimate partner or ex-partner. Domestic violence can include a variety of forms of abuse including but not limited to physical, sexual, psychological, financial abuse, stalking and intimidation. Domestic violence extends beyond physical violence and frequently involves the exploitation of power imbalances and patterns of abuse.

### **Gendered violence**

Gendered violence or Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals because of their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms. The term is primarily used to draw attention to the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence. While women and girls suffer disproportionately from gendered violence, men and particularly boys can also be victims. The term is inclusive of LGBTIQ+ populations, referencing violence related to norms of masculinity/femininity and/or gender norms.

### **Family violence**

Violence perpetrated by a family member, carer, guardian, child or kinship carer. Family violence can include a variety of forms of abuse including but not limited to physical, sexual, psychological, financial abuse, stalking and intimidation. Family violence extends beyond physical violence and frequently involves the exploitation of power imbalances and patterns of abuse.

### **People with lived expertise**

People with lived expertise are people who have experience of sexual, domestic and/or family violence who's expertise as context experts due to their lived experience is noted.

### **Specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector**

The specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector includes crisis and refuge services, transitional accommodation and community housing providers, family support services, Aboriginal controlled organisations, specialist multicultural community organisations, specialist LGBTIQ+ organisations, counselling services, sexual violence services, specialist homelessness service providers, men's behaviour change programs and networks, community organisations working with high-risk communities, specialist



women's legal and support services, women's health centres, women and children's support services, Safe at Home programs and the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services.

### **Victim-Survivor**

Victim-survivor refers to a person who is being or has experienced violence, acknowledging that people who have been victimised are survivors and are also victims of crime. We acknowledge that people who have been victimised are survivors and are also victims of crime. This is not intended as an identity term. The NSW Women's Alliance notes that the justice sector uses the term victim. In this submission, although used interchangeably, the emphasis has been placed on the term victim-survivor, with victim used at times particularly when discussing the justice system.

## The magnitude of the issue:

Different priority populations experience sexual, domestic, and family violence differently, meaning that an intersectional lens is needed in order to respond inclusively.

One in three women in Australia have experienced physical violence in their lifetime, and one in six adult women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner in comparison to one in seventeen men (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016a). One woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner on average (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network, 2018) and approximately one child per fortnight is murdered in a family violence context (Brown, 2019). 1 in 16 men experience domestic violence, demonstrating that the issue whilst impacting all genders, is more likely to impact women (Cox, 2016). Over 60% of LGBTIQ+ people report ever experiencing domestic or family violence (Hill et al., 2020).

### *The Health Impacts*

Abuse and trauma across the life course has cumulative, detrimental impacts on health and wellbeing (NSW Health, 2019). Complex trauma results from multiple, repeated forms of interpersonal violence (including sexual violence) causing traumatic health problems and psychosocial challenges (ANROWS, 2020b). Complex trauma is commonly associated with a wide range of psychiatric diagnoses and misdiagnoses, functional impairments, and an array of educational, vocational, relational and other health problems (ANROWS, 2020b). The compounding effect of intergenerational trauma often remains unaddressed and overlooked (ANROWS, 2020a).

The impacts of sexual violence are far-reaching for the individual and the community. Impacts for individuals can include relationship breakdown, financial and housing insecurity, mental and physical injuries and ill health, substance abuse issues, complex trauma, and disrupted social and economic engagement. This includes injuries and homicide and poor mental health. For children, the impacts of sexual violence are magnified. Some common trauma impacts include the development of mental health issues, sleep disturbances, learning difficulties and behavioural problems.

**People experiencing violence are not a homogenous group, and therefore policy development and program funding must recognise and respond to this heterogeneity.** None of the following risk factors make any one group inherently inclined to violence, rather the root of violence is gender inequality across all sections of society.

### *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*

Domestic violence is estimated to contribute five times more to the burden of disease among First Nations women compared to non-Aboriginal women (ANROWS, 2020a). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are three times more likely to experience violence and are more than 30 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of domestic and family violence than non-Indigenous women (AIHW, 2018). Injuries are typically more severe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women than non-Aboriginal women, with Aboriginal women aged 15 and over being 32 times more likely to be hospitalised for family violence as non-Indigenous females in 2016–17 (AIHW, 2019). In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are estimated to be at least three times more likely to experience sexual assault than non-Aboriginal women (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation [VicHealth], 2011). Aboriginal communities experience high levels of structural racism and challenges accessing services for support, making this an important priority to tackle. These experiences can prevent or limit individuals from exercising power, seeking or continuing support, accessing resources or participating in society.

### *Children and Young People*

Family violence has serious, long-term consequences on child and young person victim-survivors' development and wellbeing. One third of filicide occurs in the context of family violence, which is disproportionately high compared to similar countries (Brown et al, 2019). DFV has profound impacts on this group including negative impacts on physical and mental wellbeing development, schooling and contributing to the continuation of intergenerational cycles of violence (FVRIM, 2021; Campo, 2015). Sexual, domestic, and family violence can also make children more vulnerable to other forms of child abuse and neglect, including being sexually assaulted and/or using problematic and sexually harmful behaviours against other children.

Historically, children and young people have been the 'silent victims' of family violence. Despite the profoundly detrimental impacts of DFV on this group and the intergenerational cycles of violence it creates, children and young people are still not given a voice (Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor [FVRIM], 2021). Children and young people are primary victims of family violence, however, there is minimal evidence that the perspectives of young victim survivors were sought as standard practice (FVRIM, 2021).

### *People from migrant and refugee backgrounds*

Victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds can be at a higher risk of experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence, as they can be socially isolated, face language barriers or have limited knowledge about their rights (AIHW, 2019). Women on temporary visas are especially vulnerable, as there are limited pathways to access safety and independence, exacerbated by the inability to access government support payments and support services such as crisis or social housing (Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, 2019).

Responses for victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds must occur through a safety lens and human rights framework, ensuring universal access occurs. Communities may fear or distrust the police, government services and courts and could be reluctant to disclose private matters. The role of faith, language and culture in migrant and refugee communities should inform strengths-based models for healing.

### *People with Disability*

People with disability can be at higher risk of experiencing violence. In Australia, 18.5% of the total Australia population have some form of disability. Women living with disability are nearly twice as likely as women without disability to have experienced violence by a partner (ABS, 2021). Women with an intellectual disability were 3 times as likely to experience physical and/or sexual violence women who do not have an intellectual disability (ABS, 2021). Many specialise sexual, domestic, and family violence services are not accessible for people with disability, and training and development is required to support the sector to better support clients with a disability.

### *Older women*

Older women are the fastest growing cohort experiencing homelessness across Australia (ABS, 2016). This is often as a result of DFV, pay inequity, little to no superannuation or savings, divorce, and time taken out of the workforce as unpaid carers. Between 2013/14 and 2016/17, NSW saw an 88% growth in the number of women aged 55 and over accessing homelessness services (AIHW, 2018). The current Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) system does not include specific support for older people. Older people often fall through the cracks, experiencing a lack of continuity of support as they are referred from one service to another by crisis-support, health or mainstream services, as none of them are equipped to meet their particular need (Domestic Violence NSW, 2022).

### *LGBTIQ+ people*

LGBTIQ+ people can often experience unique forms of identity-based abuse, including threatening to out a person, pressuring them to conform to gender norms, or telling them they won't be believed because of their gender or sexuality. Intersex people may also experience body shaming, forced and coercive medical interventions within their families and intimate relationships as a result of stigma about intersex. LGBTIQ+ people are more vulnerable to gendered violence due to the cisgenderism and heteronormativity in our communities (Carman et al., 2020), with 60.7% of LGBTIQ+ people reporting experiencing intimate partner violence, 64.9% reporting having experiencing family violence in their lifetime and over 50% reporting experiences of sexual assault (Hill et al., 2020).

#### *Women with experience of criminalisation*

Women are one of the fastest growing cohorts in NSW prisons (AIHW, 2020). First Nations people are over-represented in Australia's prison population with at least a third of female prisoners identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (AIHW, 2020). The marked increase in female incarceration over the last 30 years is partially attributed to net-widening or 'upcriming', and women's increased involvement in low-level drug crime (Carrington 2013). However, as explored by the Council of State Governments Justice Centre (2021), women have very different pathways into crime than men, often experiencing childhood victimisation, turning to drugs to deal with this trauma, experiencing poverty, and becoming victims of intimate partner violence in their adult relationships. Women in prison can have multiple and complex needs, often exacerbated by inadequate access to health care before entering prison (World Health Organisation, 2014).

## The detail

1. A coordinated, whole-of-government approach to sexual, domestic, and family violence policy in NSW

### The Challenges

The prevention and response to sexual, domestic, and family violence requires a committed, whole-of-government response. The total cost of violence against women and children in Australia is estimated to be \$26 billion each year, with the cost to NSW estimated to be approximately \$6.02 billion (KPMG, 2016).

Due to the various strategies that the NSW Government have in place, it is clear that sexual, domestic, and family violence is recognised as a whole-of-government issue. However, there is a lack of coordination across the various government portfolios, with some portfolios not having a strong focus on sexual, domestic, and family violence, such as the Seniors portfolio. In NSW there are currently a range of strategies and frameworks that focus on the addressing sexual, domestic, and family violence including:

- NSW Sexual Assault Strategy (expired in 2021)
- NSW Women's Strategy (expires in 2022)
- NSW Health Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Domestic and Family Violence (2021-2026)
- NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for reform (expired 2021)
- NSW Women's Health Framework (2019)
- LGBTIQ Health Strategy (2022-2027)
- NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People (2022-2024)
- NSW Homelessness Strategy, (2018-2023)
- NSW Domestic Violence and Justice Strategy (expired 2017)

These various NSW strategies are siloed, have significant cross-over without structural linkages, and have inconsistent timeframes. There is an absence of transparency, clear targets, and consistent data to measure effectivity. NSW Government do not have a consultation mechanism with people with lived experience of sexual, domestic, and family violence, meaning that policy initiatives cannot be vetted against the real-life experiences of those who have experienced gendered violence.

### The Solutions

The establishment of a whole of NSW Government coordination group will ensure that NSW Government ministries and agencies have oversight of the development and implementation of the policies and programs designed to reduce and prevent sexual, domestic, and family violence. The establishment of an Interagency Standing Committee within Government will provide oversight and ensure transparency to actions addressing gendered violence. The coordination group would be responsible for measuring and reporting on all sexual, domestic, and family violence targets. There should be full transparency around how National Partnership funding is distributed, and the coordination group would ensure this through open memorandums and action logs.

Additionally, the introduction of a Lived Expertise Advisory Group to the NSW Government that can represent a number of diverse groups, ages and backgrounds is necessary to provide policy advice. Furthermore, emphasis on improving regional responses to sexual, domestic, and family violence is required. This includes increased funding to support coordinated, local decision making in these areas and a mechanism to enable local service providers to raise policy and program issues by the Government. The NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team has also provided a number of recommendations (DVDRT, 2020), which are all to be funded.

### **Our Recommendations**

- a. Establish an Interagency Standing Committee within NSW parliament responsible for the oversight of sexual, domestic, and family violence policy implementation in NSW.
- b. Establish an NSW Government coordination group to report to the above Committee. The coordination group should have responsibility for implementing policy and plans regarding prevention and response to sexual, domestic, and family violence across all relevant agencies and portfolios in NSW.
- c. Introduce a Lived Expertise Advisory Group to the NSW Government representing a diversity of ages, backgrounds and life experiences to embed lived expertise policy advice into the work of government.
- d. Implement a robust and effective whole-of-government risk assessment and management framework, including comprehensive training for the service sector and police.
- e. Introduce minimum standards for the specialist domestic and family violence sector to ensure services provide high quality services, guided by the DVNSW Good Practice Guidelines.

- f. All relevant policies and plans relating to sexual, domestic, and family violence include clear, meaningful, and measurable targets which are overseen by the coordination group and are subject to consultation with the sector and victim-survivors.
- g. The NSW Government should commit to the development of comparable datasets to support a consistent national approach for service data for people impacted by sexual, domestic, and family violence as part of the first 5-year Action Plan under the new National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.
- h. Fund implementation of all recommendations of the NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team.
- i. Reform and expand membership of the NSW Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Council to include additional non-government organisation representatives from the sexual, domestic, and family violence sectors and lived expertise representatives.
- j. Improve regional responses to sexual, domestic, and family violence by funding and supporting coordinated, local decision-making in rural and regional areas and introducing a mechanism to enable service providers to raise policy and program issues in rural and regional areas to be addressed by the Government.

## 2. Commit to intersectional primary prevention to end gendered violence and promote gender equality

### **The Challenges**

In Australia, women are eight times more likely to experience sexual violence by a partner than men, and nearly three times more likely to have experienced domestic and family violence than men (ABS, 2017a), demonstrating the gendered nature of sexual, domestic, and family violence. Sexual, domestic, and family violence is a symptom of wider gendered inequality, and efforts to eliminate this violence should be paired with primary prevention techniques that simultaneously foster gender equality (Our Watch, 2018).

Primary prevention involves the focus of the underlying factors or causes of gendered violence, by working across whole populations and communities to address these factors and ultimately reduce the occurrence of gendered violence (Our Watch, 2017). Gender inequality for example, is an underlying cause that can excuse, justify or promote this violence against women and children. The focus on these broad, underlying drivers has evidence to support its effectiveness (Department of Social Services 2020). However, in NSW, there is a lack of coordination of primary prevention of gender-based violence programs and a lack of resources for the development of a primary prevention workforce.



Increased funding towards primary prevention is vital if we want to end gender-based violence within our broader communities and population.

## **The Solutions**

Research demonstrates that gendered violence is preventable and that with resourcing and community action we can create families and communities free from violence (Our Watch, 2021). Violence prevention initiatives require leadership and coordination of implementation, as well as the resourcing of local initiatives and marginalised groups to adapt violence prevention initiatives to their own context.

An immediate investment in violence prevention through community education and early intervention programs in all settings can stop violence. The introduction of \$10 million per annum is necessary to strengthen and embed Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) across the NSW education system (Youth Action, 2021).

## **Our Recommendations**

- a. Fund the development of a NSW primary prevention strategy, committing at least \$1.5 million to ensure thorough consultation with stakeholders (including victim-survivors). The primary prevention strategy should include clear targets for the primary prevention of sexual, domestic, and family violence, strategies to meet those targets and avenues to monitor progress.
- b. Commit to a minimum of \$10 million per annum to strengthen and embed Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) across the education system in NSW, including in early childhood.

This funding will be provided for:

- i. Creating specific respectful relationships education roles that are embedded into the Department of Education and Training to support school-based implementation.
- ii. Building the capacity of all school/early childhood staff via training and professional learning, to be able to understand the key concepts related to RRE, curriculum delivery and how to implement a whole-of-school approach effectively and safely.
- iii. The evaluation of the impacts of RRE across school communities, to provide evidence of change over time and to support sustainability of the whole school approach.

- c. Commit to a minimum of \$10 million per annum, towards primary prevention through coordinated, fully-funded and resourced, state-wide primary prevention initiatives in all government, non-government, business and community based settings.

This will involve:

- i. Funding primary prevention initiatives designed by and for marginalised groups.
- ii. Supporting evidence-based primary prevention programs and initiatives that have already been developed.
- iii. Whole of community education and behaviour change strategies, to help change attitudes, behaviours and social norms relating to sexual violence, consent and coercive control.
- iv. Research and evaluation funding in primary prevention initiatives to build the evidence base required to inform effective, whole of community interventions.
- v. Funding initiatives which support an intersectional approach for the prevention of gender-based violence in all government, non-government, business and community-based settings. This also includes initiatives that effectively engage men and challenge the harmful forms of masculinity and harmful male peer cultures, which are key drivers of gendered violence.
- vi. Sustainable, long-term funding for specialist cultural and faith-based family violence services for comprehensive service responses across primary prevention, early intervention and response and recovery inclusive of men's programs.
- vii. Initiatives supporting the business community to engage in primary prevention.
- viii. Enhanced capacity for specialist and generalist family violence services.

### 3. Provide immediate and long-term supports for people experiencing and recovering from sexual, domestic, and family violence

#### **The Challenges**

Everyone who experiences or is recovering from sexual, domestic, and family violence should have access to immediate and long-term specialist supports, yet specialist domestic and family violence services are extremely underfunded and unable to meet demand. Short-term funding contracts, inadequate resourcing for existing services and limited access to services that support victim-survivors experiencing or recovering from violence only exacerbates the health impacts of violence and abuse and contributes to negative outcomes for adult and child victim-survivors and their communities.

Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP) service providers report long waitlists of men wanting to stop their use of abusive and violent behaviour due to the limited capacity of these groups. Waitlists for MBCPs are highly variable, with service providers in regional areas reporting consistently longer wait times and more men on their waitlists than urban providers. An online survey conducted by No to Violence in 2021 reported the average wait time across NSW is approximately eight weeks. Men motivated to attend an MBCP and change their behaviour are at risk of becoming disengaged if there is a long wait time, which can possibly lead to the inability to link current or ex partners and children to supports, leaving them at continued risk.

NSW Government funding for the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline does not cover operational costs beyond counsellor wages. All other operation costs must be met by community donations. Further compounding the funding shortfall, demand for sexual violence counselling continues to increase in line with record rates of reported sexual assault. Full Stop Australia (2020) anticipates a further 10-15% increase in client demand for sexual violence counselling and support in response to increasing community awareness including from the NSW Government's public sexual consent awareness campaign, Make No Doubt. Trauma specialist counselling outreach in regional and remote areas of NSW is limited, Community Based Counselling Services for victim-survivors of sexual violence only operate in 6 locations state-wide. Concerningly, there is no state-wide automatic referral and triage systems for victim-survivors of sexual violence and no integrated coordination between NSW Primary Health Networks and sexual assault services meaning that victim-survivors are falling through the cracks. It is important to note that sexual assault is the fastest growing crime being reported in NSW. It was the only major offence to show a significant upward trend in the 24 months to June 2021 and recorded incidents of sexual assault rose

21% year-on-year to June 2021 (BOCSAR, 2021a). Despite this alarming rise, funding for sexual violence services has not increased in real terms in over 30 years.

Debts are a common barrier to a victim survivor leaving an abusive relationship. A victim survivor can experience the financial impact long after the relationship has ended. NSW is currently the only jurisdiction in Australia in which economic abuse is not defined in any legislation. Around 85% of women who access domestic and family violence services in Australia say that they have experienced some level of financial abuse as part of the coercive control in their relationship (ABS, 2016b). Economic and financial abuse can occur alongside other forms of abuse such as physical, emotional and sexual violence and the time following a violent incident can be particularly unsafe for victim-survivors, and that a lack of access to money can be a key factor for women staying in violent relationships (Morgan et al., 2018). Deloitte research released in 2022 estimated that financial abuse costs the Australian economy and victim survivors \$10.9 billion per year, with 43 women experiencing financial abuse every hour of 2020 (Commonwealth Bank of Australia, 2022). The report Addressing Financial Abuse: A Collaborative Model for Legal and Non-Legal Support, released in March 2022, highlights the needs of victim survivors of financial abuse and recommends that the Financial Abuse Service NSW be expanded to provide holistic legal and non-legal support (Consulting & Implementation Services, 2022).

Structurally marginalised populations often do not have access to community-controlled specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence services that meet their needs. For example, the majority of sexual, domestic, and family violence services funded to provide services in NSW are only able to support women. While support for this cohort also requires more investment, this means that LGBTQ+ people who are not women have few to no avenues to access support and safety. Further, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds experience an intersection of both gender and racial discrimination in their interactions with services, whilst also attempting to accessing support through both navigate formal state-based processes and informal community based processes. Specialist culturally safe responses are necessary to ensure safety and supports are extended to meet women as required.

Finally, children and young people are over-represented when it comes to risks related to sexual abuse and assault. Sexual assaults involving victims aged 13 to 20 years accounted for two thirds of a recent sharp increase in sexual assault rates in NSW (BOCSAR, 2021b). Sexual assault is most often perpetrated by someone known to the young person- a trusted adult, a parent or caregiver or a peer. In addition, the service systems in place to respond to children and young people following a sexual assault are often complex and

difficult to navigate with the challenge of balancing autonomy and privacy for the child or young person with safety and risk, mandatory reporting requirements and engagement with parents and safe adults.

### *1. Increased resourcing for support*

Early access to specialist gendered, culturally safe legal services and other support services is also important. Women's Legal Service NSW and Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre provide specialist legal information, advice and casework to women experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence. These services take steps to ensure legal support is provided in a culturally safe way, in person and over the phone, and employ Aboriginal workers. These services also do outreach at Women's Health Centres, Family Relationship Centres, Women's Correctional Centres, Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations and in Aboriginal communities, to ensure more women who experience violence can access legal help.

Research shows women who experience domestic violence have up to 20 legal problems on average in a 12-month period (Law and Justice Foundation, 2019). Increased funding for specialist women's legal services and programs, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, Aboriginal Legal Service and Community Legal Centres would enable more women, children, and young people experiencing violence to receive the legal support they need. In addition, specific funding for lawyers and social workers for the Legal Education and Advice in Prison (LEAP) for Women program is needed to provide family and civil law legal assistance for women in prison. Women in prison and at risk of entering prison have often experienced high rates of sexual, domestic, and family violence across their life span from childhood (Council of State Governments Justice Centre, 2021).

Victim-survivors of sexual, domestic, and family violence may face additional costs associated with attending court including for travel, childcare and other costs. These expenses should not be a barrier to attend court as necessary and financial assistance for these matters should be easily accessible when needed. The Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS) provide information, advocacy and referrals to assist women and their children experiencing domestic and family violence with their legal, social and welfare needs. The ability to attend court safely is within the scope of these needs, and includes financial assistance for childcare and travel expenses. Introducing brokerage funding for WDVCASs to provide victim-survivors with financial support for needs associated with attending court allows for an easily accessible way to increase victim-survivors' ability to attend court.

Homelessness service staff are essential workers who have been stretched due to the pandemic and natural disasters such as bushfires and floods, and a funding increase to the sector is desperately needed to allow services to meet demand. Since the pandemic, bushfires and floods, 76% of staff in housing and homelessness services reported an increase in the number of clients they were unable to support and 36% reported rarely or never being able to meet demand (ACOSS, 2019).

## **The Solutions**

Specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence services need immediate, significant resourcing to keep people experiencing or recovering from violence safe, and to hold perpetrators to account.

Longer-term supports for people recovering from violence are non-existent, however the inclusion of Recovery as a pillar in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children gives significant recognition and highlights the need for services and supports to meet victim-survivors wherever they are in recovering from experiences of violence. The Illawarra Women's Health Centre has received Commonwealth funding for a state-of the art, purpose-built, Women's Trauma Recovery Centre where the various health needs of women who have experienced domestic and family violence can be addressed under one roof, however NSW funding is necessary to make the centre a reality.

Community controlled, specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence services that are designed for and by marginalised populations are an important avenue for support and recovery. Similarly, 'mainstream' sexual, domestic, and family violence services must be resourced to work in partnership with community-controlled organisations to establish clear referral pathways and inclusive and culturally responsive service delivery. People experiencing and using violence should have choice and control about the services they access. Young people in particular (as victim-survivors in their own right) should have access to dedicated, specialist services to meet their needs.

People experiencing domestic and family violence need to have immediate access to financial supports in order to increase their safety and wellbeing. Financial support must be available for victim-survivors to assist them in escaping violence, and to ensure that they are able to continue living without violence. In NSW, Victims Services offers immediate needs packages, which can be difficult for some victim-survivors to access for a multitude of reasons, as explored in the submissions of the Women's Alliance members to the Statutory Review of the Victims Rights and Support Act. The NSW Women's Alliance

recommend for brokerage to be made available in NSW based on the Victorian Flexible Support Packages. It is essential that all people experiencing domestic and family violence have access to immediate financial support for needs associated with seeking safety following violence.

## **Our Recommendations:**

### **1. Resource frontline services to respond to the needs of victim-survivors**

- a. Introduce a minimum of five year funding contracts for specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence services.
- b. Increase funding by a minimum of \$133.55 million per year for specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence services to deliver trauma and violence informed, culturally appropriate services, including investment in intersectional approaches for marginalised priority groups, this includes:
  - i. \$52 million for Women's Refuges (Specialist Homelessness Services)
  - ii. \$6 million for Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services
  - iii. \$10.5 million for NSW Women's Health Centres
  - iv. \$12 million for Specialist Women's Legal Services, including \$5 million for Women's Legal Service NSW, \$5 million for the Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre, \$1.8 million for Legal Education and Advice in Prison Program for Women, \$200,000 for the Seniors Rights Service, additional funding for Community Legal Centres and additional funding for the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services in NSW and the Aboriginal Legal Service to expand their domestic and family violence, family law and care and protection work
  - v. \$8.4 million for Staying Home Leaving Violence Program
  - vi. Specialist Aboriginal controlled domestic and family violence services
  - vii. \$1.1 million for the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline (and an additional \$500,000 in one off funding to deliver services to marginalised groups)
  - viii. \$14 million for intersectional approaches for marginalised priority groups (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse, regional, rural, and remote, people with disability, older women and younger women, LGBTQ+)
  - ix. \$2.3 million for NSW Financial Abuse Service.
  - x. \$27.25 million for Men's Behaviour Change Programs.
- c. Ensure specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence services are sufficiently funded to cover indexation including matching annual increases to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and staff award increases.



- d. Resource organisations to strengthen their trauma and gendered violence-informed practice across all domains of work. This includes:
  - i. Resourcing to review policies, procedures, governance and service provision, fund professional supervision as well as to make changes to the physical environment.
  - ii. Develop Quality Health Services Standards Comprehensive Care Planning to include trauma and complex trauma caused by sexual, domestic, and family violence.
  - iii. Resource all services who work with victim-survivors of sexual violence to meet the National Standards of Practice Manual for Services Against Sexual Violence.
  - iv. Fund the development and delivery of introductory training in sexual violence for all frontline workers who assist survivors of sexual violence to work in tandem with the [DV-Alert training](#) to increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of front-line workers.
- e. Recognise specialisation of specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence and expand funding to the specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector to increase salaries so they are commensurate with the complexity of work, skills required and impact of vicarious trauma and burnout. Increased funding would also assist providers to hire additional staff and consequently reduce workloads to a realistic level.
- f. Improved focus on the needs of marginalised population groups through:
  - i. Resourcing specialist and community-controlled organisations to provide sexual, domestic, and family violence services
  - ii. Resourcing accessibility and responsiveness plans for sexual, domestic, and family violence services to better meet the needs of marginalised groups
- g. Provide \$450,000 per annum to fund a pilot peer navigation program, where peer workers with lived experience of sexual, domestic, and family violence provide peer support navigating systems.

## **2. Fund recovery including long-term recovery supports**

- h. Increase in sexual, domestic, and family violence trauma recovery services, supported by new funding, as an essential component in a victim-survivor's healing. This would include a commitment to the development of a state-wide hub and information gateway to access trauma recovery services, networks and



opportunities to support victim-survivors to recover, re-engage and reconnect socially and economically.

- i. Support the funding of the national first, Women's Trauma Recovery Centre in the Illawarra to innovatively, safely and holistically address high levels of violence, with \$14 million for the building and \$4 million for the land. Please refer to the [business case](#) and [research report](#) by UNSW and the Illawarra Women's Health centre.
- j. Develop localised trauma specialist care coordination units within each of the 10 Primary Health Networks across NSW as a primary referral pathway for GPs and other mental and allied health professionals supporting patients or clients impacted by sexual, domestic, and family violence in need of coordinated multidisciplinary supports to heal and recover from the trauma impacts of their experiences.
- k. Expand the Community Based Counselling Service (CBCS) for people impacted by sexual violence to access trauma specialist counselling in women's health, Aboriginal health, and community and neighbourhood centres across the state to ensure universal access.
- l. Increase funding for research co-produced with victim survivors into long term trauma recovery, recovery and revictimisation, and recovery and the perpetration of sexual, domestic, and family violence.

### **3. Fund evidence-based approaches to responding to safety, health and wellbeing**

- m. Introduce flexible support packages to ensure ready and easy access to brokerage funding for all people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence.
- n. Ensure universal access to safe, legal, affordable, high quality reproductive health care including access to medical services such as abortion, safe and effective contraceptive methods and evidence-based information when considering pregnancy options.
- o. Fund support during pregnancy and for the first 1000 days after birth for women and people at risk of experiencing domestic and family violence.
- p. Ensure children and young people who have experienced sexual, domestic, and family violence receive specialist support in their own right through different touch points including resourcing and capacity building specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence and health services to provide care and support to children and young people and embedding peer support workers into services.
- q. Commit to provide financial support for travel, childcare and other costs to enable people who have experienced sexual, domestic, and family violence to safely attend court by introducing brokerage funding for WDVCSs to provide this support.

- r. Develop a state-wide triage system of sexual violence services through the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline so that no-one impacted by sexual violence is left waiting for essential trauma support.
- s. Fund support and resources for sexual, domestic, and family violence services in rural, regional, and outer metropolitan areas to build local networks of animal support services, informed by the model provided by Lucy's Project.

#### **4. Implement all 55 recommendations from the Respect@Work report**

- t. Commit to meaningfully implementing all 55 recommendations from the Respect@Work report in partnership with the Federal and other State and Territory Governments, including but not limited to:
  - i. Legislating a positive duty on all employers to prevent sexual harassment within the workplace and providing support to employers to implement such a duty.
  - ii. Ensuring NSW's gender equality strategy addresses sexual harassment and recognises sexual harassment is driven by gender inequality and is a form of gender-based violence.
  - iii. Legislating unions and other representative groups to have standing to bring representative sexual harassment claims to court.
  - iv. Ensuring all Safe Work NSW staff, workers' compensation bodies, judicial officers and tribunal members undertake training and education on the nature, drivers and impacts of sexual harassment to inform their work.
  - v. Strengthening the regulation of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) to put victim-survivor choice and control at the centre of decisions about NDAs while ensuring the public interest benefits of them are maximised and the adverse risks and consequences to victims are minimised.
  - vi. Reforming defamation laws to ensure adequate protection of freedom of speech in cases of serious investigative journalism where the alleged perpetrator may not want a matter exposed, and to introduce a standard direction or presumption in favour of confidentiality and suppression/non-publication of witness details in any defamation court proceeding where the defamatory material includes allegations of sexual harassment.
  - vii. Reforming civil procedure to protect alleged victims of sexual harassment who are witnesses in civil matters including the right to closed courtrooms, the ability to give evidence remotely, the audio-visual recording of evidence-in-chief which can be used in any re-hearing or subsequent proceeding, strengthening protections against cross-examination and the access to support persons.

- viii. Expand trauma specialist sexual assault and women's legal services to support people impacted by sexual harassment in the workplace in line with recommendations 53 and 55 of the Respect@Work Report. These services should also support people impacted by sexual harassment in other settings, such as in educational settings, in sport, entertainment, the arts, and residential service settings.

## 4. Safe and appropriate housing for everybody experiencing and recovering from sexual, domestic, and family violence

### **The Challenges**

Domestic and family violence is the single largest driver of homelessness for women and children with this group making up 42% of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients (AIHW, 2021). At least 25,000 people access NSW homelessness services per year due to domestic and family violence. 37% of young people in the Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP) lived with family violence (Yfoundations, 2021), illustrating the high number of children and young people who experience homelessness. LGBTIQ+ young people experience increased risk of homelessness due to family violence.

A lack of access to safe housing leads to a variety of negative outcomes, most pressingly, that victim-survivors return to abusive partners. Equity Economics Report on Social Housing in NSW found that up to 2,402 women returned to live with a violent partner due to their inability to afford an alternative safe space, while 2,410 entered homelessness due to their inability to find secure and permanent housing after leaving violence (Equity Economics, 2021). Whilst SHS services can move women seeking assistance into temporary housing, very few move into stable, long-term, safe and appropriate accommodation due to lack of safe, affordable options.

On census night in 2016 there were an estimated 6,866 women over 50 across Australia who were homeless – this is a 31% increase in five years since 2011 (ABS, 2017b). The increased challenges to accessing housing due to the pandemic, and the price increases in regional and rural areas have been widely reported. Seven years on, the housing crisis is at an all-time high, with the asking rent on a three-bedroom home increasing by 13.9% in the last 12 months (SQM Research, 2022a), and the purchase price on the same property increasing by over 21.4% (SQM Research, 2022b). A sharp increase in housing stress and homelessness, particularly for those reliant on the private rental market, suggests an urgent policy response is needed.

Older women are the fastest growing cohort experiencing homelessness across Australia (ABS, 2017b). This is often as a result of domestic and family violence, pay inequity, little to no superannuation or savings, divorce, and time taken out of the workforce as unpaid carers.

### **The Solutions**

The provision of long term social and affordable housing is the most cost effective and sustainable response to reducing homelessness. Secure, stable and long term social and affordable housing is critical to promote the safety, wellbeing and best possible outcomes for women, children, and young people. Social housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will help NSW to meet their targets under Closing the Gap. With the housing system at capacity, there is an urgent need to build more social and affordable housing in NSW.

The NSW government received an additional \$1.47 billion in stamp duty in 2021 and a higher-than-expected return on investment for social housing stock. While a return of 6.5% from the Social and Affordable Housing Fund was expected, the NSW Government is currently receiving a return closer to 14%. The money raised from housing stock could be invested into further social housing to meet the increasing demand.

Long-term housing initiatives are proven to be integral to supporting safe outcomes for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence (Brekenridge et al., 2013), which would also provide returns for the NSW economy. Equity Economics (2021) estimates that an annual investment of \$2.6 billion would deliver 5,000 additional units of social housing and create 14,000 jobs across the NSW economy. Investment in social housing would also avoid \$38.5 million a year in costs from women returning to a violent partner, and \$68 million a year due to women experiencing homelessness because of domestic and family violence.

Specialist Homelessness Services deliver high quality responses to hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people experiencing domestic and family violence, performing to quality assurance measures under Australian Service Excellence Standards. Following significant investment through the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, there was a 3% decrease in the total number of Victorian homelessness clients from 2017–18 to 2018–19 and a 10% decrease in family violence clients following years of steady increases in these numbers (AIHW, 2021).

The delivery of the NSW Core and Cluster Refuge Model will support up to an additional 2,900 women and children escaping domestic and family violence, each year. Based on the successful implementation of similar reforms in Victoria (Domestic Violence Victoria, 2020), it is critical that the NSW government consults with specialist domestic and family violence services, and ensures a strong regional focus and central governance throughout the delivery.

The Housing First model is a strategic response to homelessness built on the principle that safe and secure housing should be quickly provided prior to, and not conditional upon, addressing other health and well-being issues. Housing First programs have had positive evaluations in the USA (Johnson, Parkinson & Parsell, 2012) and Europe (Revelli & Paidakaki, 2022). Results from an Australian pilot, the MISHA Project by Mission Australia, have been promising, with 97% of clients still living in secure housing after two years; and the associated cost savings to government equated to \$8,002 per person, per year (Conroy et al., 2014).

The current priority housing age of 80 years leaves a huge gap in support for people aged between 55 and 79 years, particularly those who are not yet eligible for the pension. Older women do not meet strict eligibility criteria, having often led traditional lives as renters or homeowners and due to unforeseen circumstances, some now face the difficult reality of being homeless later in life. If the NSW government were to lower the priority housing age, this would ensure that vulnerable older people are not left homeless and without access to support. Acting early to prevent homelessness, support tenancies and provide support is cost effective and reduces stress and trauma for people at risk of homelessness. The Victorian Home at Last model offers a wraparound support service for older people comprising both early intervention and crisis support.

### **Our Recommendations:**

- a. Invest \$2.6 billion annually to provide 5,000 new social and affordable housing dwellings every year for the next decade across NSW.
- b. Provide specific social and affordable housing allocation to people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence as a priority cohort.
- c. Invest in social housing for specific marginalised communities including Aboriginal owned housing, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, young people, older women, and housing suitable for families and children.
- d. Introduce central and regional coordination bodies, including NGOs, government, and representatives from marginalised groups to support the implementation of the new Core and Cluster refuges.
- e. Ensure all women, children and young people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence can immediately access transitional housing by increasing the available stock across NSW by 50%.
- f. Ensure women on temporary visas experiencing violence and abuse and their children can access a safe home by expanding eligibility for crisis, transitional, and social and affordable housing to include this cohort.

- g. Adopt a Housing First Model in NSW to ensure women, children and young people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence have safe and fast access to a long-term home.
- h. Lower the priority age for social housing eligibility from 80 to 55 years as a matter of urgency.
- i. Fund a specialist older person's housing information and support service that comprises both an early intervention and crisis response, similar to the Housing for the Aged Action Group 'Home at Last' model in Victoria.
- j. Remove the two successive day limit and the 28 day per year limit on access to temporary accommodation and review the suitability of accommodation offered to ensure it is safe for women, children, and young people who have experienced SDFV violence.
- k. Introduce mandatory affordable housing targets of 15-20% for private residential developments and a 30% target for redeveloped state government land.
- l. Implement minimum standards and guidelines for meanwhile use accommodation to ensure properties are safe and fit for purpose, in-line with the existing ASES policy framework.
- m. Conduct an audit across NSW to identify and acquire accommodation that may be appropriate for repurposing in consultation with community housing services, specialist domestic and family violence services, and peak bodies.
- n. Invest \$500 million in a comprehensive maintenance program across the NSW social housing portfolio over the next 10 years.
- o. Review existing funding mechanisms for community housing, with the objective of identifying the most efficient and sustainable models to deliver social and affordable housing.
- p. Introduce streamlined development approvals for Community Housing Providers to fast-track affordable housing projects and reduce planning and delivery costs.

## 5. Reform legal systems and policing for people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence

### **The Challenges**

People experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence are likely to have multiple and complex legal issues relating to Apprehended Violence Orders, family law, care and protection of children, victims support, housing and tenancy, and debt. 33,278 Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOS) were issued between April 2019 and March 2020 (BOCSAR, 2021b), and in 2020-2021, 33,659 family and domestic violence offences were finalised in NSW Courts (ABS, 2022). However, we know the levels of violence in the community are much larger with only approximately 20% of women contacting the police following domestic and family violence (AIHW, 2018).

In NSW, people who are experiencing domestic and family violence can be required to attend different courts on multiple occasions for AVO applications, criminal matters related to domestic and family violence, and family law matters (Family Law Council, 2016). This can be a confusing and intimidating process and may re-traumatise people who have to re-tell their experiences of violence repeatedly. Court may not feel like a safe or a culturally safe place for people.

People attending court for gendered violence matters can experience intimidation, abuse and physical violence by the perpetrator and their supporters while waiting for their case to be called, during the court hearing, or when leaving the court. Further barriers exist when attending court in rural, regional and remote areas, where the courts are often small and have limited facilities. Many regional and remote courts have no meeting rooms for lawyers to speak with their clients privately and no safe rooms (National Domestic Violence Bench Book, 2017). Additional barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from refugee and migrant communities may include fear community reprisal and shaming about the sexual, domestic, and family violence. Women from refugee and migrant communities with a disability can face even greater challenges, as the disability support systems in place may not be culturally appropriate (The Judicial Council on Cultural Diversity, 2016).

Systemically, there continues to be a lack of understanding of coercive control within the justice system and the best way to identify and respond to this type of abuse. Coercive control, as defined by Evan Stark (2007, p. 15), is a “pattern of domination and control that is created through a collection of behaviours”, rather than any single form of abuse or



behaviour. The current Criminal Justice System does not deal with this well, given its incident-based nature. The complex interplay of factors that formulate coercive control cannot be recognised in isolation, with BOCSAR (2022a) finding that current course of conduct offences, such as stalking and intimidation, rarely rely on an actual course of conduct. In fact, stalking is rarely charged at all, and intimidation consists of verbal threats over 50% of the time, which can be one-off threats or threats repeated a handful of times.

Further concerns are raised by the complexity of coercive control not being well understood by NSW Police, with training on any aspects of domestic violence past recruitment training at the NSW Police Academy being scarce, voluntary, and based on area capacity. While new courses on domestic violence are currently being developed and rolled out with encouraging feedback, specific, domestic violence-specialist co-designed and co-delivered training on coercive control needs to be funded and provided to all police officers before proclamation.

In addition, the justice system is not working for survivors of sexual violence. Despite decades of legislative reform, sexual offences remain under-reported, under-prosecuted and under-convicted (NSW Law Reform Commission, 2020). The ABS (2020) estimated that, between July 2018 and June 2019, only 28% of Australians aged 18 years and over who experienced sexual assault reported a sexual violence incident to police, yet in NSW reporting rates have increased by 4.2% in the past five years (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2022b). Sexual assault charges are also more likely to be withdrawn by the police or the prosecution and are less likely to result in a guilty verdict than charges for other serious offences (ABS, 2020). Many victim-survivors delay reporting due to fears in disclosure and the shame and stigma that may come with instituting proceedings (Tidmarsh & Hamilton, 2020).

## **The Solutions**

It is imperative that people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence have access to consistent and safe responses and support across the legal system.

- 1. A safe, phased, transparent approach to the criminalisation of coercive control.*

We need a phased approach to further criminalising coercive control in NSW. This must start with a definition of coercive control that includes all forms of domestic and family violence and systems and cultural reform in our justice system. The draft *Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2022* (the Exposure Draft) is complex and requires sufficient time to conduct extensive consultations. We note that the Queensland Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (2021) recommended the criminalisation of coercive control in

Queensland but did so on the precondition that service and justice responses to domestic and family violence were improved. We suggest NSW should follow suit, in a phased approach.

First, everyone across all sectors and systems must be able to identify and understand coercive control and know how to respond so that women, children, and young people can get the help they need. Second, we need to ensure that First Nations, multicultural communities and people with disabilities are not negatively affected by the new laws. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors are disproportionately misidentified as the predominant aggressor of domestic and family violence (ANROWS, 2020c). The risk the draft legislation poses to First Nations, refugee and migrant communities as family abuse is currently not considered. It is essential this legislation considers the ways coercive control exists in all communities, in particular the risks the legislation creates in First Nations and multicultural communities.

Third, any cultural reform must include police implementation of the Auditor-General's report into police responses to domestic and family violence in NSW (Women's Legal Service NSW, 2022). Finally, an independent coercive control implementation taskforce must be immediately established. It should have oversight of draft legislation and consultation processes, the implementation process prior to commencement (focused on systems and cultural reform as well as training), and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. We recommend a legislative requirement for the tabling of a report to Parliament prior to the commencement of the new offence, outlining all the implementation work undertaken prior to commencement, with the commencement date being delayed if insufficient implementation work is undertaken. This is an important accountability mechanism. There also need to be regular and ongoing statutory reviews following commencement, with the first review no more than 3 years after commencement.

## *2. Ensure sexual, domestic and family violence court specialisation for sexual, domestic, and family violence matters*

People who have experienced sexual, domestic, and family violence should be able to access services and personnel who understand gendered violence, can support them to participate in a fair hearing, and hold perpetrators of violence to account. There is considerable evidence to support specialist integrated domestic and family violence courts with combined jurisdiction to hear apprehended violence order matters, criminal matters related to domestic and family violence, and family law matters to the extent that family law jurisdiction is conferred on NSW courts (Australian Law Reform Commission [ALRC],

2010; Queensland Courts, 2017). At a minimum, sexual, domestic, and family violence specialisation is required in each of these courts – including specialist judges and magistrates, specialist lawyers and barristers, specialist workers to support victim-survivors, specialist interpreters, and, where relevant, specialist police.

### *3. Make courts safe for people who have experienced sexual, domestic, and family violence*

By ensuring that all people who have experienced sexual, domestic, and family violence can access courts safely, people will be more likely to engage with the justice system to ensure their safety and hold perpetrators of violence accountable. This work should begin with increasing cultural safety for all priority cohorts in NSW courts. The NSW Government has committed to providing Audio Visual Link (AVL) in many NSW courts; however it is essential that this investment is continued and that all courts across NSW can protect victim-survivors through AVL options.

Support services for victim-survivors, in particular for those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and refugee and migrant communities, must be culturally appropriate and easily accessible. All WDVCSs are staffed with Aboriginal Specialist Workers, and most locations have Multicultural Focus Workers, who are embedded in their own local domestic violence networks for further specialist referrals/consultations. It is essential that the courts work with the WDVCSs and their specialist workers to maintain culturally safe and accessible services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and refugee and migrant communities.

### *4. Ensure people experiencing violence can access consistent, safe police responses to sexual, domestic, and family violence*

Whilst police practices have improved, the NSW Auditor General found that responses across the state are often inconsistent due to inequitable workforce distribution and a lack of mandated domestic and family violence training past the initial Academy and probationary year training (Audit Office of NSW, 2022). Police often do not consistently and appropriately identify and respond to domestic and family violence and as a result, people experiencing domestic and family violence who report breaches of AVOs do not receive consistent responses to all reports of breaches (Laing, 2013). There are barriers for priority populations to report domestic and family violence to police, including First Nations women and children, refugee and migrant communities, women with disability, LGBTIQ+ communities, children and young people, older women and criminalised women. Police

failure to take appropriate action is traumatising, may deter people from making future reports of violence and increases the risks to their safety. Australian research has found that “nearly 60% of police surveyed indicated their belief that “often victims assisted a perpetrator to breach a Domestic Violence Protection Order, affecting enforcement” (Taylor et al., 2017, p. 2).

The lack of resourcing, training and adequate risk assessment and management frameworks and tools also means NSW Police officers are often not appropriately equipped to identify a person who is the predominant aggressor of domestic and family violence. This particularly impacts on First Nations women, women in multicultural communities, and LGBTIQ+ people. Incorrectly identifying a person who is experiencing domestic and family violence as the perpetrator can increase the risk to a victim's safety by discouraging them from seeking support from police in the future. If an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) is taken out against a victim, this can have severe consequences including intervention by child protection services, a loss of care of children in family law proceedings and loss of employment (Mansour, 2014).

*5. Increase access to the Victims Support Scheme and promote greater transparency and accountability to the scheme.*

The NSW Women's Alliance supports and endorses the Joint Position Statement on the case for removing the requirement to separately prove injury in NSW Victims Support applications in order to make the scheme more accessible. Currently Victims Support applications require two separate pieces of evidence. These include one piece of evidence to prove an act of violence and a separate medical, dental or counselling report to prove injury. The statement expressed the need for removal of the requirement to separately prove injury:

*“It is clear that sexual violence, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, child abuse and modern slavery always cause harm to the victim-survivor. It is also clear that the requirement to separately prove injury in Victims Support matters causes harm and trauma. It is also the case that in many applications for Victims Support, the need to separately prove injury causes delay in the resolution of a claim for Victims Support.”*

Many victims-survivors need help to gather evidence for accessing support. The changes implemented in July 2020 shifted the burden of collecting evidence for applications from Victims Services to victim-survivors. If Victims Services does not return to collecting evidence for victim-survivors, the NSW Government must fund non-government organisations to do this work.

Additionally, we advocate for an increase to time limits to apply. The current time limits on Victims Services applications present a barrier to accessing support.<sup>1</sup> People who have experienced violence, particularly sexual violence, child sexual abuse, domestic and family violence, child abuse or modern slavery, may not disclose their experiences nor seek support for many years due to fear and stigma, not identifying what has happened is a crime, and family and social pressures (Women's Legal Service, 2016). There needs to be discretion to apply out of time so people who have experienced violence can access the support they need.

There must also be greater recognition of sexual, domestic, and family violence through higher recognition payments under the Victims Support Scheme. There is no specific category relating to domestic and family violence. The most common category for domestic violence is assault that provides the lowest recognition payment of \$1,500.

Finally, there is little transparency in the role of NSW Commissioner Victims' Rights. One person has the role of both Executive Director Victims Services and Commissioner Victims' Rights. There needs to be a fully funded and independent Commissioner Victims' Rights, as well as full accountability and transparency, publishing data available from use of the scheme. Ensuring all victims are supported by all application decisions being reviewed at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) is also integral to strengthen victims' support.

### *7. Improve legal responses to sexual violence in the NSW justice system*

We recommend a taskforce is introduced to lead reforms necessary to better cater to victim-survivors of sexual violence. With sexual assault the fastest growing crime in NSW (BOCSAR, 2021b), enacting the recommendations of the BOCSAR project into experiences of complaints of sexual offences within the criminal justice system needs to be a priority. The suggested taskforce will be able to lead and ensure dedicated focus on the reforms necessary to improve victim-survivor safety and access to justice.

Additionally, the NSW Women's Alliance recommends piloting complementary options for people who have experienced sexual violence to access justice. International jurisdictions

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<sup>1</sup> To be eligible for financial assistance, people who have experienced violence must make an application within two years of the act of violence or two years after turning 18 years. The only exception, for child sexual abuse, offers limited financial support if the person who has experienced child sexual abuse applies after the two-year time limit. To be eligible for a recognition payment, people who have experience domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse must make an application within 10 years from the act of violence, or 10 years after the day of turning 18 years. There is no time limit for a recognition payment for child sexual abuse.

such as New Zealand, Canada and USA have restorative practices addressing sexual violence dating back 40 years, offering successful outcomes. “With adjudication through the criminal legal system largely underutilised due to retraumatization, scrutiny from law enforcement professionals, and high rates of case closure, restorative justice has emerged as a promising option for survivors to repair harm and experience accountability” (Burns, & Sinko, 2021, p.3).

## **Our Recommendations:**

### **1. A safe, phased, transparent and accountable approach to the criminalisation of coercive control.**

- a. Prioritise an extensive and proper consultation process with the specialist SDFV sector, leaders and leading organisations representing priority populations and people with lived expertise, following the release of the public consultation draft of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2022 (NSW) prior to further criminalising coercive control. Immediately establish an independent implementation taskforce. A report be required by legislation to be tabled in parliament prior to the new offence commencing outlining all the implementation work undertaken, with the commencement date being delayed if insufficient implementation work is undertaken. Further regular and ongoing statutory reviews following commencement are also required, with the first review no more than 3 years after commencement.
- b. Ensure the criminalisation of coercive control considers the wide range of relationships in which domestic and family abuse may occur.

### **2. Ensure sexual, domestic, and family violence court specialisation for sexual, domestic, and family violence matters**

- c. Commit to ensuring all courts are staffed with specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence lawyers and judicial officers in metropolitan and regional and regional areas of NSW working in meaningful partnership with relevant local stakeholders.
- d. Regular and ongoing training for all legal practitioners, judicial officers, court staff and interpreters to respond to sexual, domestic, and family violence in a trauma-informed, culturally safe way with an evaluation of training for its effectiveness.

### **3. Make courts safe for people who have experienced sexual, domestic, and family violence**

- e. Commit to ensuring courts dealing with sexual, domestic, and family violence matters are culturally safe and accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,

refugee and migrant communities, and LGBTIQ people and people with disability through imbedding WDVCS support into court practice.

- f. Commit to provide safe waiting areas and rooms that are accessible for people with disability, separate entry and exit points, quality audio-visual link and interpreting facilities across 152 Local, 9 Children's and 14 Family Law Courts.

#### **4. Ensure people experiencing violence can access consistent, safe police responses to sexual, domestic, and family violence**

- g. Train NSW Police officers to respond appropriately and consistently to domestic and family violence including:
  - i. Appropriately identifying domestic and family violence.
  - ii. Actioning breaches of Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) and monitor progress.
  - iii. Correctly identifying the person who is the predominant aggressor of domestic and family violence and the person most in need of protection and monitor progress.
  - iv. Cultural safety and working with priority populations.
- h. Train and support all NSW Police officers to identify and respond appropriately and consistently to sexual violence and specialised training for officers investigating sexual offences to ensure they respond in a trauma-informed and culturally appropriate way. This would involve a commitment from the NSW Police Force to adopt a trauma-informed model of supporting victims through the process of reporting and giving evidence in criminal procedures. It would also require adequate supervision and support for police officers, including managing secondary or vicarious trauma.
- i. The NSW Police force to establish Sexual Violence Liaison Officers in every Local Area Command to meet the needs of individual communities.
- j. The NSW Police Force to establish a state-wide automatic referral process for sexual assault, sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offence and sexual harassment matters, including those which occur in non-domestic settings. These should be triaged through the state-wide sexual assault service to local sexual assault services.
- k. The NSW Police Force introduce accountability frameworks to effectively respond to systemic issues, including systemic racism and sexism and other forms of discrimination.
- l. Consistent with Coronial Inquest recommendations:
  - i. Annual compliance checks to ensure NSW Police implementation of sexual, domestic, and family violence and abuse policies and procedures and public reporting of these results as well as outlining action to address any concerns.



- ii. The publishing of annual dip sampling of policing of sexual, domestic, and family violence undertaken by specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence police, including any Police Area Command variation and the measures that will be taken to resolve any concerns.
- m. The NSW Police Force develops clear and transparent policies and procedures to ensure safe reporting of alleged perpetration of sexual, domestic, and family violence and abuse by a police employee and that those policies and procedures address conflict of interest issues and include independent oversight of such investigations.

## **5. Increase access to the Victims Support Scheme and promote greater transparency and accountability to the scheme.**

- n. Strengthen the Victims Support Scheme by:
  - i. Removing the requirement to separately prove injury in Victims Support applications.
  - ii. Removing time limits for financial assistance and recognition payments, including removal of time limits, particularly for victim-survivors of sexual violence, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, child abuse and modern slavery.
  - iii. Greater recognition of domestic and family violence, sexual violence and modern slavery through higher recognition payments.
  - iv. Victims Services returns to collecting evidence for victim-survivors or the NSW Government funds non-government organisations to do this work.
  - v. Ensuring all Victims Support application decisions can be reviewed at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT).
  - vi. A fully funded and independent Commissioner Victims' Rights.

## **6. Improve legal responses to sexual violence in the NSW justice system**

- o. Establish a taskforce focused on improving the criminal justice response to sexual violence.

This includes the:

- i. funding of specialist care coordination/case management teams.
  - ii. the implementation of evidence and procedural reforms including the right to closed courtrooms, the ability to give evidence remotely, the audio-visual recording of evidence-in-chief which can be used in any re-hearing or subsequent proceeding, strengthening protections against cross-examination and the access to support persons.



- p. Commit to all recommendations arising from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research project into experiences of complaints of sexual offences within the criminal justice system.
- q. Examine and pilot complementary pathways to supplement the criminal justice system in holding perpetrators to account and delivering justice for victim-survivors of sexual assault, noting that the overwhelming majority of victim-survivors of sexual assault do not want to report to police or engage in current court processes but do want access to justice.
- r. Employ culturally appropriate forensic examination staff so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors have greater access to culturally appropriate forensic examinations.

## 6. Enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to lead change towards ending sexual, domestic, and family violence in their communities

Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person has the right to live free from violence. Yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience violence at three times the rate of non-Indigenous women and are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised due to domestic and family violence (ABS, 2019). Three in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have experienced sexual or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (Webster, 2016).

The ongoing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, in addition to gendered factors, drive violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Our Watch, 2018). These impacts include systemic oppression and racism, racialised structural inequalities of power, and condoning of, and insufficient accountability for, violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Our Watch, 2018).

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are often under-funded, experience high demand, and over deliver on their funding. Workers and organisations are involved in self-motivated, innovative and successful initiatives to respond to and prevent gendered violence, however there is a lack of support and ongoing funding to support these community-led solutions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence face a range of barriers to reporting and seeking support including fear and mistrust of government agencies and police due to previous poor conduct, discrimination and culturally inappropriate responses, community pressure to not report violence to the Police or to not leave a violent relationship, and poverty and disadvantage due to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and dispossession.

### **The Solution**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women hold cultural knowledge and have lived experiences that enable them to better understand how government strategy, policies and programs impact on their communities. Enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to hold a central role in informing the development of government strategy,

policies and programs related to sexual, domestic, and family violence would promote the safety and wellbeing of women children, young people.

Supporting not only self-determination but truth-telling and honest sharing of stories, there will be an ability to heal from past wrong-doing, to better understand the ongoing impacts of that harm and to address the gendered drivers of violence for Aboriginal communities.

Many Aboriginal people strongly prefer to receive services from ACCOs. These services are well connected to communities and are better able to engage community members and to understand and respond to trauma. ACCOs hold the knowledge and relationships to refer people to the culturally safe services to address their accommodation, support and healing needs.

It is essential that there are well resourced ACCOs to provide specialist support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence that is safe and confidential. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may feel concerned about privacy, the community pressure to stay with a violent partner, and keeping their family together.

### **Our Recommendations:**

The NSW Women's Alliance supports recommendations from the DVNSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Womens' Steering Committee in the following areas:

#### **a. Self determination**

- i. Implement a Truth and Justice Commission in NSW, followed by a treaty. Through commissions, stories and truth are heard. These powerful stories of hope lead to change. Without self-determination, sexual, domestic, and family violence can never truly be addressed, which in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, is deeply linked to colonisation and dispossession of land.
- ii. Aboriginal communities must lead the process for responding to and preventing sexual, domestic, and family violence in their communities. Provide the resources to do this, and the strategies and systems in Aboriginal communities need to be supported by government and other non-government organisations.
- iii. Recognise the leadership and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in domestic, and family violence. Include Aboriginal leaders in decision making regarding domestic, sexual and family violence in the whole community.

#### **b. Accountability**

- i. Ensure accountability and transparency of government actions about Aboriginal communities experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence across all departments and levels of government. This needs to be beyond words, but words embedded in actions. In particular, there is concern about the lack of information being shared and the need for accountability in the child protection, legal, and health systems.
- ii. Ensure accountability of the policing of sexual, domestic, and family violence in Aboriginal communities. Introduce auditing and measurement of the progress towards change.
- iii. Ongoing, meaningful engagement with First Nations people, including victim-survivors, is essential to achieving accountability.

**c. Systems change**

- i. The systems aren't working for Aboriginal communities. They can't be tweaked at the edges. Undertake thorough review of support systems so they are safe and responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- ii. There are intersecting issues: child protection, pathways to prison, homelessness, etc. Break the cycle of recidivism, of imprisonment and child removal, and work alongside people and give them the supports they need to connect to culture and support.
- iii. Seek the expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to design prevention responses which will achieve successful outcomes in Aboriginal communities.

**d. A safe home for our mob**

- i. People experiencing domestic violence need a safe place to live. Introduce 5000 social housing dwellings per year, including homes specifically for Aboriginal women experiencing domestic and family violence.
- ii. Housing availability is at crisis levels in regional, rural and remote communities. Invest in safe homes for people to live in these areas.
- iii. Current stock isn't safe for people experiencing violence. Invest in making temporary accommodation and social housing options that are safe and secure, sufficiently distanced from people using violence, with appropriate measures.
- iv. Perform a needs analysis of ACCOs to identify their needs and how best to support them.

## 7. Develop and implement a workforce development plan for the specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector

The NSW social sector or community services workforce provides essential care and support to over one million people each year – including those impacted by poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, mental health challenges, disability, or other complex issues (Equity Economics, 2021). Research suggests the NSW social sector will demand an additional 62,000 jobs by 2030, including 27,000 in regional NSW (Equity Economics, 2021). This will create a significant need for skilled specialist domestic and family violence workers.

In 2017, one in four workers in community service organisations in NSW were aged 55 or over (Cortis & Blaxland, 2017). In the domestic and family violence sector, workers were from an even older cohort with approximately half of the staff being of retirement age by 2027 (Cortis & Blaxland, 2017). The COVID 19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing workforce issues for a female dominated, under-resourced sector. Demand for services has increased, workers have been stretched and at higher risk of burn-out (Risse & Jackson, 2021). The community services workforce remains strongly female dominated and employment is characterised by high rates of part time and casual employment. Services face challenges recruiting and retaining Aboriginal specialist workers and hiring, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, there are additional challenges including often being the sole identified worker in a service with little support, and working in the same communities as home, making it difficult to switch off due to the responsibilities of community and feeling like they're on call 24 hours a day.

Released in 2016, the NSW Government Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016- 2021: Safer Lives for Women, Men and Children began the work of assessing the workforce development needs of the sector but did not finalise a workforce strategy (NSW Ministry of Health, 2016). To date, there has been no formal assessment of the workforce development needs of the sexual violence sector. NSW has committed to implementing target 13 under Closing the Gap as well as initiatives under the next National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children. A thorough workforce development plan is necessary to be able to meet NSW's National commitments.

### **The Solution**

Effectively responding to sexual, domestic, and family violence is specialist work which requires certified training and continual skill development to ensure quality service delivery. Ongoing professional development in the specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector urgently needs to be addressed. Current areas of professional development needed in the sector include complex trauma and gender-informed practice, cultural safety, non-fatal strangulation, coercive control, animal abuse and technology facilitated abuse. Specific solutions are required to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, which must be codesigned with Aboriginal leaders and specialist community organisations.

Further, the Aged Care Royal Commission (2021) noted that there are at least 50 sexual assaults taking place in residential aged care facilities per week. This calls for upskilling of frontline staff on providing specialist assistance to this vulnerable cohort, as well as improving police responses to dealing with this abuse. Many workers in the sector have personally experienced domestic and family violence, and many more clients of services are retraining to enter the workforce. Specific training pathways are needed for victim survivors of domestic and family violence to work as specialists.

Our solution is to develop and implement an NSW workforce development strategy which includes:

- i. Specific strategies for attracting and retaining sufficient skilled and qualified staff to meet the current and projected worker shortage.
- ii. A particular focus on supporting employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.
- iii. A particular focus on skills development and recruitment and retainment in regional and rural areas.
- iv. Resourcing the sexual, domestic, and family violence sector to respond to stress, burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.
- v. Employment pathways for victim-survivors who wish to enter the workforce.

### **Our Recommendations:**

- a. Invest in the development of a ten-year workforce development strategy for the specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector in NSW that includes:
  - i. \$20 million to support skill development for up to 1315 new graduates to enter the specialist domestic and family violence workforce, gain employment and develop the skills to work in this specialist field.

- II. \$2 million annually to provide additional training and skill development opportunities to the current workforce.
- III. \$3.8 million annually to support the Male Family Violence Intervention sector's workforce development.
- IV. \$1 million annually to support and equip the sector including specialised training for sexual violence professionals on how to respond to complex trauma, vicarious trauma management and the funding of a community of practice for sexual violence professionals.
- V. Introduce lived expertise pathways to employment as specialist DFV workers.
- b. Fund a thorough training program for current specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector employees in complex trauma and gendered violence-informed practice, cultural safety and awareness, risk and compliance, violence prevention, health and wellbeing, strangulation and brain injury, animal abuse and how to counter the impact of vicarious trauma.
- c. The NSW Women's Alliance supports recommendations from the DVNSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Womens' Steering Committee to:
  - i. Reshape the mainstream definition of what is considered good practice, performance and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
  - ii. Introduce access to better training that is appropriate to Aboriginal ways of learning and teaching.
  - iii. Ensure services are culturally safe with access to free cultural safety training mandatory across the NSW social services sector. Aboriginal workers need to be able to speak in community. If the workplace is safe, the workers can be safer.
  - iv. Support building the workforce of specialist domestic and family violence workers who are Aboriginal, so better support can be provided to Aboriginal communities. Resource education pathways, fund scholarships, mentoring and supports.

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