Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence

From the AHURI Inquiry
Integrated housing support for vulnerable families

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Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
DFV	Domestic and family violence
FaCS	Department of Families and Community Services (NSW)
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
SAM	Safety Action Meeting (NSW)
SFCU	Safe Families Coordination Unit (Tasmania)
SHIP	Specialist Homelessness Information Platform
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Service(s)

Glossary

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Executive summary

Key points

- The principal crisis response for women and children who have to leave their home due to violence is provided by the Specialist Homelessness Services system, yet data suggests that for many clients, there is little services can do to provide a pathway from crisis into stable, secure and long-term accommodation.

- Existing DFV support programs cannot compensate for the absence of affordable, suitable housing—so moving from short-term or transitional accommodation into permanent, independent housing is very difficult, and sometimes unachievable, for women and children affected by DFV.

- Reliance on private rental market subsidies as a way to achieve housing outcomes is problematic in tight markets and such assistance cannot always successfully overcome other barriers like limited affordable supply and competition from other prospective tenants.

- Governments around Australia have adopted strategic responses to domestic and family violence that promote integrated service delivery for affected families.

- This integrated response to domestic and family violence is generally working well, promoting collaborative working relationships amongst services and providing support that is valued and appreciated by service users.

— For service users, a relationship with a skilled, capable and well-connected support worker is crucial, both therapeutically and for sustaining their engagement with support.

— Other areas of government policy, such as the income support system, can exacerbate poverty and disadvantage and make re-establishing stable housing more difficult for victims.

- Where safe, secure and affordable housing is not available, women may decide to return to a violent relationship because they perceive this as a safer option than the alternatives.

In recent years, domestic and family violence (DFV) has had a high profile as an issue warranting governmental and societal attention and intervention. Governments have adopted strategies, policies and programs designed to hold perpetrators accountable and support and protect victims. These have been accompanied by substantial investment and reform to promote the provision of more integrated services for families affected by violence. The relationship between DFV and homelessness is also well recognised, with responses ranging from traditional interventions like women's refuges through to 'safe at home' programs, which promote women's right to live in their own homes without violence.

Research indicates that effective responses for people experiencing DFV include an integrated range of interventions (Breckenridge, Rees et al. 2016). In particular, secure, stable housing is critical to promote safety and wellbeing, including for children (Breckenridge, Hamer et al. 2013). Women leaving violence travel a diverse range of housing pathways, including moving

between different housing tenures and markets, depending on their resources, choices and needs.

Key findings

Policy

All jurisdictions have adopted strategic responses to DFV supported by legislative frameworks. Approaches vary, but in general, states and territories have adopted governance models that explicitly draw different perspectives and policies together, and reforms to services that emphasise connected and collaborative approaches, consistency of practice, and capacity-building within non-specialist agencies, particularly police.

However, attention to the housing needs of women and children leaving violence is much less prominent—although states and territories offer a range of policies and programs, there is limited evidence of widespread take-up of interventions designed to address systemic barriers across the housing market.

> *The way our system is set up is as a system of shelters for people, mainly for women, fleeing a violent situation and many of them with their children. And unfortunately, our capacity to offer suitable, affordable and safe housing options for these women has deteriorated over the last few years. On one income, it is now unaffordable for an adult to re-establish a home in a private rental market, which is really their only option for housing. Some, of course, will attain social housing, but not anywhere near the numbers that need it. (stakeholder)*

Pathways

Because our primary recruitment method was through service providers, the service users interviewed for this research had all received assistance, including housing assistance, from services. This experience may not be typical, as AIHW data on unmet need (AIHW 2018a; 2018b) suggests that a high proportion of requests for assistance with accommodation, particularly long-term accommodation, are unable to be met.

Our further analysis of AIHW data also indicated that for many recipients of SHS assistance, there is little change in housing situation over the time in which they receive support. The data implies that the most important determinant of someone's post-support housing situation may well be the housing situation they were in prior to commencing support. Services do appear able to move people who are entirely without shelter into some kind of housing, but few of these clients are moving into stable, long-term, appropriate accommodation. This suggests that **specialist homelessness assistance is not functioning as a mechanism for moving people along housing pathways.**

Integration

Our interviews with service users and service providers indicated that at a day-to-day practice level, integration is less about specific initiatives or programs and more about the **maintenance of productive, mutually-supportive working relationships between agencies and/or workers.**

For service users, support from a capable, caring and well-connected case worker is crucial. A number of participants had experienced rudeness, disrespect or a lack of empathy from frontline workers in non-DFV services, and this actively discouraged them from approaching those services again for help.

> *I think the service needs to understand what these women are going through and how frightened they are and how at a loss they are. They can't necessarily move on. And*

you're treating them as if they're annoying. Or you don't get back to them when you say you will. Or you just don't have anywhere for them or what you have is a crap suburb and it's not a safe house—it's like, come on! (worker)

There are gaps in the current system, including inadequate legal assistance, delays in access to counselling and other services, and constraints on the length of time women can receive intensive assistance. More critically, policies and practices in other areas of government can undermine integration and work against the needs of people trying to leave violent relationships. In particular, the research identified:

- inadequate income support payments that leave women and children living in poverty and unable to afford decent housing;

- limited protection and assistance for migrant women sponsored to come to Australia by men who later become violent and abusive;

- challenges at the intersection point between the child protection and family violence systems, particularly where lack of housing prevents women from regaining custody of children taken into statutory care; and

- Family Court decisions that trap some women in unaffordable housing markets in order to enable their violent ex-partner to continue to have access to children.

Integration may be ineffective when it results in the dilution of specialist expertise and experience and it can be difficult to achieve in small rural communities where there is limited availability and coverage of critical services, including police.

Housing

Existing DFV support programs cannot compensate for the absence of affordable, suitable housing—so moving from short-term or transitional forms of accommodation into permanent, stable, independent housing is extremely difficult, and sometimes unachievable, for women and children affected by DFV.

Women leaving DFV theoretically have three tenures available to them: home ownership, social housing and the private rental market.

- In practice, **home ownership** is out of reach for many service users. (Women who own their home and are victims of DFV may not use SHS and other services because they do not need them or because they do not know about them; these women are often 'invisible' to the service system, to policy and to research).

- Access to the **social housing** system is restricted by decades of residualisation, underfunding and targeting to those with the most complex needs. Although it remains an important housing option for women escaping DFV and is valued for the ongoing affordability and tenure security it offers, in some areas it is inaccessible to women leaving DFV, as well as other groups facing barriers in the private housing market.

  You can email the housing delegate and ask her to organise that and she could get priority being put forward as a serious risk at Safety Action Meetings, but if there's no properties, it doesn't matter what priority list you're on, there's no properties. (worker)

- To alleviate pressure on the social housing system, governments have developed specific subsidies or programs available to assist people escaping DFV to access **private rental housing**, including the Rent Choice Start Safely subsidy in NSW and the Rapid Rehousing head-leasing program in Tasmania. Families may also be eligible for state-based bond assistance programs, and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) at the national level.

Those interviewed suggested that this support is valuable in certain markets, giving women a degree of choice and flexibility and access to a greater portion of the market than they would otherwise have had. However, in other markets, where rents are high and climbing, the assistance provided is insufficient to effectively defray the cost of rent or make housing of adequate size and quality available. Even if housing is affordable with the subsidy, once the subsidised period ends, the unsubsidised rent becomes unsustainable.

Even if they can afford rent, women leaving violence may also face discrimination from landlords, or be unable to effectively compete with childless, working couples in tight markets where landlords can choose from a large number of prospective tenants. This can be compounded if they have a poor tenancy record due to the behaviour of a violent ex-partner, or are stigmatised due to receipt of a government-funded housing subsidy.

Safety

DFV often leads to homelessness, but this research found that victims sometimes decide to remain in or return to a violent relationship because of the lack of available and appropriate housing.

The shortage of affordable housing means that women can feel pressured to accept accommodation that is substandard, too far from critical support networks or located in neighbourhoods or settings that feel unsafe or are unsafe. Housing choices may be further constrained by the actions of a perpetrator who continues to harass the victim.

If women reject a housing offer due to fear, trauma or a desire to provide appropriate living conditions for their children, this can be perceived by services or defined within policies as declining support or failing to engage, which has ramifications for future offers.

> *Having a clean mattress is one of the most important things because they've probably come from having really nice stuff and if you're forced to put your child on a soiled mattress because that's all there is then you start thinking, this is what I've forced my children into, maybe it wasn't so bad at home. A stained mattress is a huge barrier to a woman staying away. (worker)*

DFV is a diverse and complex phenomenon and does not always involve physical violence. When responding to DFV, policy makers and service providers need to recognise the complexity of the circumstances within which women exercise agency and make decisions, and direct support and assistance accordingly.

Policy development options

This research found that largely, the immediate response to DFV is effective and timely, although constrained by resources and growing demand. The main challenge facing services and their clients is the lack of pathways by which women can move on from crisis and transitional responses into secure, long-term housing.

Government investment in social housing is inadequate and access restricted to those in greatest need. Expenditure on direct housing provision has been replaced by a focus on the provision of individual subsidies (Caulfield 2000; Dodson 2006; Yates 2013). These are not always effective in tight and costly rental markets, and as a result, housing options are limited, and safety and security are not assured.

Women and children leaving violence are in diverse circumstances and have a range of needs. The crisis system provides valuable support for many, but the lack of secure, affordable and permanent housing is a systemic issue. To meet the needs of vulnerable families, more

investment is needed in a range of affordable housing options, including safe, secure and supportive social and affordable housing.

The findings of this research have a number of implications for policy and practice:

- The SHS sector plays a critical role in providing assistance, including access to shelter, for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

  — However, the system is under considerable pressure, much of it deriving from the lack of realistic, appropriate 'exit points' from crisis assistance into stable, long-term housing.

  — Provision of such 'exit points' is beyond the capacity of services, which must rely on other parts of the system, including social housing and the private rental market, to accommodate their clients.

- 'Integration' is mostly working well for service providers and users, and women and children who seek assistance are generally finding the support they need.

  — However, there are gaps, inconsistencies and shortcomings in the system, and other areas of government policy can act to further marginalise people affected by violence by forcing them into further poverty or trapping them in inappropriate housing situations.

  — The effectiveness of the system is underpinned by relationships, amongst workers, organisations and institutions, and between clients and workers. These relationships are crucial, but can be jeopardised by excessive workloads, burnout and frustration. If workers treat clients with disrespect, impatience or rudeness, this can discourage clients from seeking help in future.

- There is little integration between the DFV response and the wider housing system, and therefore women leaving violent relationships are routinely unable to obtain long term, safe, affordable, accessible and appropriate housing.

  — Without secure housing, vulnerable families remain in crisis and transitional housing for longer than is appropriate. This creates insecurity and uncertainty for them, and puts pressure on the whole crisis response system.

  — Private rental subsidies and head-leasing have alleviated some pressure on social housing and offered women a pathway into the private rental market. However, there is an inherent contradiction in expecting a profit-oriented market to act as part of the housing assistance system. Even with subsidies and other support, affordability, competition and scarcity continue to present barriers for those perceived as less desirable tenants due to assumptions about risk. This includes women and children seeking to leave a violent relationship.

  — Social housing continues to be an important destination tenure for women leaving DFV. While it does not always offer an ideal living environment for women dealing with trauma or safety concerns, it does provide secure tenure and ongoing affordability. The residualisation of the sector limits opportunities to generate positive revenue streams for investment in new supply—yet this could have wider social and economic benefits and contribute to greater social equity (Flanagan, Martin et al. 2019).

- The lack of adequate and affordable housing is leading some women to make the decision to return to, or remain in, a violent relationship.

  — Much of the attention given to DFV has focussed on situations where violence is physically harmful and the risk of serious injury or death is high (valentine and Breckenridge 2016). These situations undeniably exist, but so do other forms of violence that may be less visible and may not be perceived in the same way, including by victims.

— This research demonstrates that housing options available to women leaving violence can often be substandard, in a neighbourhood that feels risky or dangerous, or involve frequent moves (due to insecure or short-term tenure) that disrupt children's schooling and support networks. In such circumstances, women may decide that returning to the perpetrator is a better, safer option for them and their children.

The study

This research is part of a wider AHURI Inquiry into housing outcomes after domestic and family violence. It had three main components:

- a desktop policy review which mapped the policy and service landscape, producing a summary of the legislative framework, key documents, strategies, governance arrangements and major initiatives related to DFV in each state and territory;

- in-depth interviews with 28 women who have had to leave their homes due to DFV, exploring their housing histories and current circumstances, their experiences of receiving support, and their perceptions of wellbeing, safety and risk for themselves and (if applicable) their children; and

- interviews and focus groups with 80 policy, service delivery and industry stakeholders to explore their views on housing pathways for women affected by violence and to obtain insight into the day-to-day practice of service integration.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted in two contrasting case study jurisdictions, New South Wales and Tasmania. The findings were contextualised by the desktop policy review and by additional analysis of national Specialist Homelessness Services data from 2016–17 on the housing situations of women affected by DFV at the commencement and completion of support.

1   Introduction

Domestic and family violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, and a high profile area of social concern. Research suggests that the safety and wellbeing of women and children who are victims of violence improves when services and supports are integrated and linked to long-term housing stability.

In response, a national strategy on preventing violence against women and children has been adopted by COAG, and all state and territory jurisdictions have implemented strategic frameworks to ensure support for victims is consistent, coordinated and comprehensive. There has also been substantial reform of criminal justice responses and investment in 'safe at home' programs that allow victims to retain secure, stable housing in their own or another home of their choice.

This research examines how housing support for vulnerable families can best be integrated with other forms of support to improve safety and wellbeing. Currently, women leaving violence move through a diverse range of housing pathways, and despite the importance of safe, stable housing, housing assistance is not always available and there are many structural impediments to affordability, security and stability in any kind of tenure.

The report draws on a desktop national policy review and qualitative interviews with 28 service users and 80 stakeholders, including policy makers, service providers and industry representatives, in two Australian jurisdictions (NSW and Tasmania).

1.1   Background to this research

In recent years, domestic and family violence (DFV) has had a high profile as an issue warranting government, and indeed societal, attention. Although the degree to which this profile has produced genuine change is arguable, it has led to significant intervention by government in programs designed to improve responses to DFV by holding perpetrators accountable and supporting and protecting victims. These initiatives have been accompanied by substantial investment and strategic and systemic reform to promote the provision of more integrated, 'seamless' services to women and children affected by violence. There is also greater recognition of the gendered dimensions of family violence, reflected in the national strategy promulgated through COAG, the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2010–2022*.

DFV has long been recognised as a leading cause of homelessness, especially for women and children, and homeless women have been one of the main target groups for government-funded homelessness services since the 1970s (Bullen 2015). But DFV is cross-class and experienced by women in all socioeconomic circumstances and all forms of housing. In recognition of this, responses have expanded beyond the traditional focus on women's refuges to include interventions like 'sanctuary' or 'safe at home' programs, which are designed to promote women's right to live in their own homes without violence, including through forcible removal and exclusion of the perpetrator (Spinney 2012; Spinney and Blandy 2011). Despite this, the proportion of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients experiencing DFV has grown

steadily from 32 per cent of all clients in 2012–13 to 40 per cent in 2016–17 (from 77,870 clients to 114,757 nationally). In 2016–17, 39 per cent of these clients were homeless at the beginning of their 'support period', and 61 per cent were considered at risk of homelessness (AIHW 2018a).

Although new programs and initiatives are continually emerging, many of the underlying principles and objectives of service delivery, particularly the need for integrated services and long-term housing stability, have been established long enough to assess how well they are working for women affected by DFV. This research project is part of a wider Evidence-Based Policy Inquiry[1] examining the effectiveness of housing policies and practices in preventing homelessness and enhancing safety and wellbeing for women and children affected by DFV. This project, which focuses on experiences of women and children in mainstream services, was guided by a central research question supported by three sub-questions:

- How can housing support for vulnerable families best be integrated with other types of support to enhance safety and wellbeing?
  — What types of support do women find helpful when moving house after violence; and what assists them to plan for the future?
  — In what circumstances are children safe and well?
  — What are the costs and benefits associated with changing housing tenure type?

The research collected qualitative data from women who have experienced changes to housing as a result of DFV, and from service providers and policy stakeholders, supported by a national policy and program review and SHS data. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in two contrasting jurisdictions, New South Wales and Tasmania, and implications for other jurisdictions and the national policy agenda are discussed where possible.

1.2   Policy context

The starting point for this research was a review of the current DFV policy context. The intent was to capture the broad focus of the strategies and service delivery frameworks in each jurisdiction, including significant initiatives or programs and key contextual information relevant to these (for example, the development of much of Victoria's current strategic response has come out of the recent Royal Commission into Family Violence). This enabled us to identify patterns across the country and note significant gaps (for specific details of the approach used, see section 1.4).

All jurisdictions in Australia set DFV in a legislative context and all have flagship strategies. These strategies, led by the Australian Government's *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2010–2022*, which is endorsed by COAG, generally contextualise DFV as a crime that primarily affects women, with this gendered dimension sometimes explicit from the strategy's title. Legislative definitions take a broader approach, and many also explicitly address the harmful effects of DFV on children. In some jurisdictions this is reinforced in child protection legislation which defines exposure to DFV as a form of child abuse (Table 1).

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[1] https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-in-progress/ahuri-inquiries/evidence-based-policy-inquiry-71160

Table 1: Legislative and strategic responses to domestic and family violence in Australian jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Strategies
Commonwealth	*Family Law Act 1975* • broad definition of family violence • includes provisions for children who are exposed to family violence ('exposed' defined as seeing, hearing or otherwise experiencing the effects of violence, including comforting the victim, seeing the victim's bruises or other injuries, or being present when emergency services attend an incident)	*National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2010–2022* (endorsed by COAG in 2011 and operationalised through Action Plans: Third Action Plan released October 2016; Fourth Action Plan to be released 2019) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (2015, developed by Our WATCh)
NSW	*Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* • violence defined primarily by reference to a series of offences in the Crimes Act • no specific reference to exposure of children to violence but one of the objects of the Act is to protect all people, including children, who experience or witness violence, and measures to ensure children are protected in any proceedings are explicitly included) *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* • definition of children in need of intervention includes children who, as a result of living in a household where domestic violence has occurred, are at risk of 'serious physical and psychological harm'	*It Stops Here: Standing together to end domestic and family violence* Framework for Reform (February 2014) *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform: Safer Lives for Women, Men and Children* (August 2016) *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy 2017–2021* *NSW Domestic Violence Justice Strategy: Improving the NSW Criminal Justice System's Response to Domestic Violence 2013–2017* (criminal justice system specific)
Victoria	*Family Violence Protection Act 2008* • definition of family violence includes behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness or be otherwise exposed to abusive, threatening or coercive behaviour within a family or family-like relationship *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* • no specific reference to family violence in the list of grounds for a child to be considered 'in need of protection'	*Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change* (November 2016) *Family Violence Rolling Action Plan 2017–2020* (replaces Roadmap for Reform) *Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women* (2017)

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Strategies
Queensland	*Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* • exposure of a child to domestic violence is one of the grounds for intervention by police or courts ('exposed' defined as seeing or hearing a violent act or otherwise experiencing the effects of violence, including comforting the victim, seeing the victim's bruises or other injuries, or being present when emergency services attend an incident) *Child Protection Act 1999* • no specific reference to family violence in the definitions of 'harm' or 'child in need of protection'	*Queensland says: not now, not ever. Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016–2026* *Second Action Plan of the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016–17 to 2018–19 (follows First Action Plan, which focussed on prevention and support provision)* *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Engagement and Communication Strategy 2016–2026 (part of Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy)*
Western Australia	*Restraining Orders Act 1997* • definition of family violence includes exposing a child to family violence ('expose' defined as seeing or hearing a violent act or otherwise experiencing the effects of violence, including comforting the victim or being present when emergency services attend an incident) *Children and Community Services Act 2004* • list of reasons a child may be in need of protection includes emotional abuse ('emotional abuse' defined as including 'being exposed to family violence')	*Freedom from Fear Action Plan 2015: Working towards the elimination of family and domestic violence in Western Australia* (launched September 2015): includes action plan (*Safer Families, Safer Communities: Kimberley Family Violence Regional Plan*) specific to Kimberley region focussing on Indigenous family violence *WA's Family and Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy to 2022: Creating safer communities* (follows *WA Strategic Plan for Family and Domestic Violence 2009–2013*)
South Australia	*Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse) Act 2009* • broad definition of abuse (where 'abuse' occurs within a relationship it is referred to as 'domestic abuse') • entitles children over 14 who are at risk of hearing, witnessing or otherwise being exposed to an act of abuse by one person against another to apply to the Court for an intervention order (an intervention order can be issued to protect any child in a similar situation) • decisions over whether or not to issue an intervention [protection] order must take into account the	*A right to safety: the next phase of South Australia's Women's Safety Strategy, 2011–2022* *Taking a Stand: Responding to Domestic Violence* (launched 2014 in response to Coroner's recommendations in relation to the murder of Zahra Abrahimzadeh)

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Strategies
	need to prevent children from being exposed to abuse and the need to minimise disruption to the victim and any children in their care *Children's Protection Act* 1993 (to be progressively repealed and replaced with *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* between February and October 2018) • no specific reference to family violence in definition of 'abuse or neglect' *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* • no specific reference to family violence in definition of 'harm'	
Tasmania	*Family Violence Act 2004* • deliberate damage to an affected child's property is explicitly included in the definition of family violence, which is otherwise confined to violence against a spouse or partner ('affected child' defined as a child whose safety, wellbeing or interests are 'affected' by family violence) *Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 2005* • list of reasons a child may be 'at risk' includes being an 'affected child' within the meaning of the Family Violence Act • being an 'affected child' under the Family Violence Act is explicitly included in mandatory reporting provisions	*Safe Homes, Safe Families: Tasmania's Family Violence Action Plan 2015–2020* *Taking Action: Tasmania's Primary Prevention Strategy to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2012–2022*
Northern Territory	*Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007 (under review)* • includes universal mandatory reporting obligations: maximum penalty for failure to report is over $20,000 *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* • 'harm' is defined to include exposure of the child to physical violence, such as a child witnessing violence between their parents	Safety is Everyone's Right: NT *Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy 2014–2017* *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Framework* (under development)

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Strategies
Australian Capital Territory	*Family Violence Act 2016* • definition of 'family violence' includes a child hearing, seeing or otherwise being exposed to abusive behaviour by someone to another family member; • broad definitions of 'family member' and 'abuse' *Children and Young People Act 2008* • definition of 'abuse' includes a child seeing or hearing the abuse of another person with whom they have a 'domestic relationship', or being put at risk of seeing or hearing such abuse, where this exposure is causing or would cause significant harm to the child	*Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy 2011–2017* *ACT Government Response to Family Violence* (strategy addressing findings of three commissioned reports released in May 2016)

Source: Authors. Compiled as part of desktop policy review undertaken during research (Section 1.4).

Within the frameworks provided by their respective strategies, states are adopting integrated responses to DFV, although this is operationalised in various ways and at various levels (Section 2.2). Broad themes include governance models that explicitly draw different perspectives and responsibilities together and service provision that emphasises connected approaches to service delivery, such as single contact points, case conferencing, the coordination of support provision by local 'hubs' and multi-disciplinary or 'wraparound' delivery. In certain areas of policy, there is a push for uniformity within and between jurisdictions, such as with regard to risk assessment, practice standards and the administration of protection orders (in the case of the latter, a national scheme has now been established).

'Safe at home' style policies exist in most states and the model has received funding support at the national level. Some states have introduced programs to support families into the private rental market, and some jurisdictions have funded additional crisis or shelter accommodation. The intersection between family violence and homelessness has been specifically recognised in some places—Victoria has established a Family Violence Housing Assistance Implementation Taskforce; Tasmania's affordable housing strategy explicitly overlaps with its family violence strategy. A number of states have introduced or continued measures to make private rental lease changes easier in family violence situations. However, explicit roles for social housing providers are less evident, and overall, housing is one of the least addressed areas of the various state strategies (Section 2.5).

The recognition of DFV as a gendered crime is reflected in the targeting of services primarily to women and children, while the focus for men tends to be awareness programs directed at changing attitudes and behaviour. Some jurisdictions have programs for perpetrator rehabilitation, and these are also mainly for male perpetrators, although models vary and efficacy appears uncertain. In Victoria male victims are explicitly diverted into separate, less specialised systems, although they are also recognised as a 'diverse community' requiring specialised attention. The concept of intersectionality is not prominent: Victoria explicitly promotes it in its strategy but none of the other states do. 'Intersectionality' refers to the ways in which the experiences of women are formed by the intersections of gender with other aspects of identity, such as Indigeneity, class, disability and age. Intersectionality theory emerged as a critique of the neglect of race in analyses of violence against women (Crenshaw 1991) and

since that time has generated a broad field of study into the forms of inequality and differences among women (Cho, Crenshaw et al. 2013; Stubbs 2015).

1.3   DFV and housing

There is growing evidence that effective responses to the needs of people experiencing DFV encompass a broad range of interventions, including housing support. Previous research demonstrates that the effectiveness of housing support in promoting safety and wellbeing for victims, including children, is affected by the provision of other types of help, especially in education, training and employment (Breckenridge, Hamer et al. 2013; Spinney 2012). In addition, 'integrative' models of housing support, like 'safe at home' programs, have been found to have a particularly important role in preventing DFV-related homelessness; Spinney (2012: 69) argued that they should be expanded to a level 'as extensive as the current provision of refuge and crisis accommodation across the country'.

Women and children leaving a violent relationship experience a diverse range of housing pathways, including moves within or between different housing tenures and markets. A 'housing pathway' is an analytical concept that 'allows for individual circumstances to be used as a basis for appropriate aggregation whilst still allowing for different situations in terms of the resources, preferences, and choices of individuals' (Clapham, Mackie et al. 2014: 2017). The pathways approach has particular potential for analysing the housing experiences of women and children who have experienced DFV, given the diversity of resources and preferences within this group.

However, although access to long-term housing is critical for those leaving violence, housing assistance is not always available. Among SHS clients seeking assistance due to DFV, the proportion whose housing outcomes have improved after receiving support has increased since 2012–13, but still less than half (47%) of those who were homeless when support began were assisted into housing in 2016–17, and just 4 per cent of those who specifically requested long-term housing support received this assistance (AIHW 2018a). In particular women who are less connected to the workforce—those working part-time or casually or who are older or sole parents—are at greater risk of insecure housing (valentine and Breckenridge 2016).

Historically, social housing was Australia's principal housing system safety net. Although a relatively small component of the rental market, social housing still plays an important role in providing security and affordability to women on low incomes and with complex and ongoing needs. Yet as the state retreats from direct provision through public housing, there has been a corresponding increase in reliance on providing demand-side subsidies to assist households to move into and pay for private rental housing (Caulfield 2000; Dodson 2006; Yates 2013).

For women and children leaving violence, one of the main forms of housing assistance currently offered is in the private rental market. For example, in NSW there is a subsidy specifically for clients escaping domestic violence, called Rent Choice Start Safely, which includes assistance with bond and ongoing rental subsidies for a period of up to three years. In Tasmania, the equivalent program is called Rapid Rehousing, and is provided as a $10,000 subsidy per head-leased property to community housing providers, with the funding to be used to assist with costs, including rent or security upgrades, for up to 12 months (but in some cases for considerably shorter periods). Tasmanian women leaving violence can also apply for general assistance with entering or remaining in the private rental market, including with bond, rent in advance or arrears and removals; most states have some form of bond assistance available although eligibility and assistance varies across jurisdictions.

Across Australia private rental and community housing tenants reliant on income support or family assistance payments may be eligible for CRA through the Australian income support system. CRA rates are determined by household circumstances and rent paid, with a cap on the maximum amount of assistance.

In addition to housing assistance being critical for families leaving DFV, the literature also underscores the important contribution made by other service areas, and the potential for poor integration between services to undermine good outcomes (Breckenridge, Rees et al. 2016; Spinney 2012). Spinney (2012: 2) argues that 'the most effective homelessness prevention measures for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence often combine legal/judicial, housing and welfare policy and practices in an integrated manner in order to improve their safety'. But despite heightened national concern over the 'scourge' of DFV and rhetoric regarding the importance of whole-of-government approaches, services are frequently still fragmented and localised (valentine and Breckenridge 2016).

Box 1: The Australian housing market

It has been well documented that the Australian housing market has become increasingly unaffordable, especially for low income households. For example:

- median house prices have risen rapidly, quadrupling since 1970, while real wages have only doubled (Yates 2017);

- there has been a marked decline in home ownership over the past 30 years especially among younger and low-income households (Ong 2017);

- social housing is increasingly difficult to access due to stringent eligibility requirements (Wilkins and Lass 2018); and

- while real rental growth has been steadier than house price growth, there are significant spatial variations (Stapledon 2017), and shortages of lower-priced rental dwellings that low-income households can afford (Rowley and Ong 2012; Stone, Sharam et. al. 2015; Yates 2017; Anglicare Australia 2018), particularly in capital cities and some regional and coastal areas.

From 2001 to 2016 rates of housing stress increased across most of Australia for households in both private rental and social housing. Renting is common among sole parent families and around 60 per cent of these live in private rental and experience the highest levels of persistent financial stress of all household types. Private rental also offers little stability—26 per cent of all tenants move within one year and 48 per cent move within three years, while social housing tenants are much less likely to move (9% in one year and 21% in three years) (Wilkins and Lass 2018: Tables 3.8, 3.10, 3.11, Figure 10.3).

While social housing is more affordable than private rental housing, as rents are set as a percentage of income, social housing is increasingly unavailable and supply has not kept up with need (Yates 2017). In 2016, social housing only represented 4.2 per cent of total housing stock in Australia (AHURI 2017). Tightening eligibility criteria means that only those with high and complex needs are accommodated, and there can be lengthy waiting periods even for these households.

Movement from renting into home ownership is increasingly unlikely. On average, in any given year of the 2001 to 2004 period, 14 per cent of renters became home owners, but this rate has steadily declined, so that by the 2013 to 2016 period, it had fallen to 10 per cent (Wilkins and Lass 2018: 132). The decline is more pronounced for younger age groups (Wilkins and Lass 2018) and households in the bottom two income quintiles (Ong 2017).

1.4   Methods

The research had three components:

The first, a **desktop policy review**, mapped the policy and service landscape, producing a summary of the legislative framework, key documents, strategies, governance arrangements and major initiatives related to DFV in each state and territory and at the national level. The summary was compiled over an extended period during 2017 and 2018 using publicly available material from the internet (primarily government and key NGO websites, as well as the AUSTLII database). Thematically, the process was guided by the conceptual framework of the overarching Evidence-Based Policy Inquiry: integration, housing pathways and gender. Extracts of the findings are included as appropriate throughout the report.

In a rapidly changing policy field, any mapping exercise is vulnerable to becoming out-of-date relatively quickly, and some information may have changed since it was added to our overview. Some initiatives might also have been overlooked (especially smaller services delivered by NGOs) or have been in place long enough that they were no longer prominent on the sites consulted. However, the purpose of the review was to provide context for the research and identify broad policy direction and emphasis rather than to compile an exhaustive compendium of every policy, strategy and resourcing response.

The second research component was a **qualitative study of women who have experienced DFV**. We originally planned to conduct in depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with approximately 40 women in each jurisdiction but recruitment proved difficult in both NSW and Tasmania. This is not surprising, given the degree of difficulty women in this position face, which would make participating in research a low priority for them. Ultimately we recruited 28 women across the two jurisdictions, but we were able to adapt other aspects of the methodology to partially compensate for the lower number (see below).

Service users were interviewed on their housing histories and current housing circumstances, experiences of receiving (or not receiving) formal and informal support and assistance, wellbeing, sense of safety and risk, hopes and plans for the future, and their perceptions as to the impact of their housing and support experiences on their children (if applicable). The interviews deliberately did not include questions about the violence the women had experienced—our focus was on their engagement with the services and support system, and whether they had received the assistance they needed to rebuild their lives.

The third component of the research was a series of **interviews with policy and service delivery stakeholders** in both jurisdictions. We originally planned to interview relatively few stakeholders, but due to the lack of success in recruiting service users we increased the number of service providers approached. The integration of perspectives gathered through different methodologies or methods or from multiple stakeholder groups has been used elsewhere to enable triangulation of research findings (Campbell, Goodman-Williams et al. 2018). This has included research in areas where researchers might expect to find tensions or differences of opinion or disputes between perspectives—for example different perspectives on family relationships (Sands and Roer-Strier 2006) or service delivery to vulnerable groups (Palinkas, Criado et al. 2007). Triangulation can yield complementary, convergent or dissonant findings (Sands and Roer-Strier 2006: 236); in this research, all three were evident but largely, perspectives were convergent, in that service users and practitioners' accounts largely substantiated each other.

Our methods of analysis were inductive: we did not follow Palinkas, Criado and colleagues (2007), for example, in quantifying the level of consensus across the interview transcripts. However, awareness of the convergences and also complementarities across perspectives and dissonances between them informed the analysis presented in this report. Ultimately, 74 practitioners were interviewed, either one-on-one or as part of focus group discussions, 26 in

Tasmania and 48 in New South Wales, as well as three representatives of peak bodies in the housing and DFV sectors and three private real estate industry representatives.

The interviews with both service users and providers were recorded and transcribed in full for thematic analysis using NVivo. Extracts from these transcripts are incorporated into this report, but the quotes are presented as illustrative excerpts only, and have therefore been edited for readability; elisions and breaks in conversation are not shown and potentially identifying information has been removed to protect the safety, both actual and perceived, of research participants. The interview findings are primarily reported in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

The interviews were conducted in two jurisdictions, NSW and Tasmania, which are presented as case studies. The findings from these jurisdictions have relevance for other jurisdictions because of their shared characteristics and policy settings, and because of the differences between them. They offer a valuable point of comparison because they share key policy settings, including extensive 'Safe at Home' programs, enabling analysis of the effectiveness of these policies in different contexts. They also vary, in size, population and service delivery frameworks. At the time of designing the project, they experienced distinct differences in private rental market affordability, especially between their capital cities. However, in the last two years, there has been a dramatic change in the Tasmanian rental market, and rental affordability in Greater Hobart is now worse than it is in Greater Sydney (SGS Economics and Planning 2018; Chapter 4 of this report).

The service user research participants were diverse. High level demographic data is provided in Table 2. The women we interviewed lived alone or with their children, although some had other children in addition to those they lived with; these other children were either living independently or with the woman's former partner. Almost all the participants relied on income support payments as their principal source of income, which means that almost all were on incomes that put them very close to or below the poverty line. Just four of the 28 received income from paid employment. Eight of the women, all of whom had been born outside Australia, reported a current or previous visa status which had put various levels of restriction on their ability to claim benefits—some had Centrelink Special Benefit as their only source of income while one woman received no support from Centrelink and was therefore reliant on her ex-partner paying her maintenance to support the care of their child.

Table 2: Characteristics of service users who participated in the research: jurisdiction, household type and income source

Jurisdiction		Household		Income	
NSW	24	Lives alone	5	Single Parenting Payment	4
Tasmania	4	With children (1)	10	Newstart Allowance	5
		With children (2)	10	Other Centrelink payment	11
		With children (3+)	3	Centrelink payment and wages	3
		With grandchildren	1	Wages	1
				Spousal maintenance	1
				Special Benefit	3

Note: Children includes adult children (i.e. non-dependent). 'Other Centrelink payment' includes one person on Disability Support Pension, one on Carer's Pension and nine whose specific payment type was not identified.

Source: Authors.

The sample is not representative of the wider population of women leaving violence or of service clients. There are some cohort groups whose experiences are not well captured by this—or other—research, such as women with disability. Only one participant in this study reported receiving the Disability Support Pension, although for nine participants, the payment type was unknown. This means this research could not fully capture the additional and distinctive issues facing some groups of women leaving violence, such as the barriers confronting women with disability in obtaining assistance, including housing, that is accessible and appropriate (Cockram 2003).

As well as triangulation with an increased number of service provider interviews, the lower than anticipated numbers of service user participants led us to incorporate a limited analysis of SHS data (i.e. Specialist Homelessness Information Platform, or SHIP, data) made publicly available by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). This did not extend to statistical modelling of pathways through homelessness services, but we did use the data to contextualise and validate the interview findings in relation to the outcomes of housing and homelessness assistance. The results are reported in Chapter 2.

2   Pathways: an overview of homelessness data

A 'housing pathway' is an analytical concept capturing the dynamism, change and subjectivity inherent in people's interactions with house and home over time and space. The concept is increasingly prominent in housing policy as states try to encourage greater movement through the housing assistance system to ration assistance and contain expenditure.

The service users in this research had all received specialist homelessness service (SHS) support, but were not always typical of the SHS client group. AIHW data suggests that many people who approach SHS for assistance, including those affected by DFV, have significant unmet needs, especially with respect to long-term housing assistance.

As part of this research, we analysed the first and last reported housing situations of all female SHS clients who were aged over 18, had experienced DFV and had closed support periods. The findings indicate:

- services are moving people who are initially entirely without shelter into some form of accommodation, but few of these clients are moving into stable, long-term and appropriate accommodation

- good housing outcomes following support are largely associated with a good housing situation prior to receiving support.

This suggests that SHS assistance is not functioning as a mechanism to move people along housing pathways. This is most likely because of the lack of exit points out of crisis and transitional accommodation into long-term housing.

2.1   What do we mean by pathways?

A housing pathway was defined by Clapham (Clapham, Mackie et al. 2014: 2017) as 'patterns of interaction (practices) concerning house and home, over time and space'. It was developed from the two other conceptual frameworks used to understand changes in housing over time, housing 'histories' and housing 'careers'. Each of these was potentially problematic: housing histories were oriented towards the past only, while housing careers implied a predetermined and normative upward trajectory. 'Pathways' instead captures dynamism, change and subjectivity, and recognises 'the impact that past decisions and a changing context can have on future circumstances' and the differences between individuals and groups with respect to these (Clapham, Mackie et al. 2014: 2017).

In the Australian context, Chamberlain and Johnson (2011) have extended the 'pathways' concept to homelessness, identifying five 'ideal typical' 'pathways into homelessness'. One of these is family breakdown, in which DFV is one of the two principal triggers for part of a family, usually women and children, becoming homeless.

Housing policy makers, most notably in NSW, are increasingly conceptualising housing assistance in the context of a 'pathway' model. In such an approach, housing assistance is 'a pathway to independence and an enabler of improved social and economic participation' (NSW

Government 2016: 6). This makes housing assistance a transition point on an individual housing pathway, not a permanent state of affairs. However, in contrast to the emphasis in the academic literature on moving away from notions of housing experiences as a 'trajectory', the housing 'pathway' in policy is conceptualised as continual movement towards a more 'independent' state. Yet for this pathway to work, more independent forms of housing need to be readily available. Chamberlain and Johnson's (2011: 69) research found that for people made homeless due to family breakdown, homelessness was expected to be a short-term experience, but that 'this was rarely the case'—alternative housing was difficult to find and establish.

2.2 Pathways through homelessness services

The population seeking assistance from homelessness services is not typical of the population as a whole. In the DFV context, for example, not all those affected by DFV seek help from formal sources and not all people who leave their home due to DFV approach specialist homelessness services. For some victims, this is because they have alternatives available to them—they are able to stay with supportive family or friends or have sufficient economic resources to find alternative housing for themselves. For others, the decision not to seek assistance from services arises from shame or fear, such as the fear of losing custody of their children. Partly because it is easier to contact service users, research and policy knowledge of the experiences of these women is limited.

2.2.1 Housing pathways: research participants

The 28 women who participated in interviews for this study reported varied housing experiences. They were asked about their housing histories, including the housing they lived in with their ex-partner, what type of accommodation they went to directly after leaving the violent situation, and their current housing circumstances. This information was extracted from interview transcripts and collated using Excel.

- Half of the 28 participants (i.e. 14 women) had lived in private rental when with their ex-partner. Four had been renting in social housing, three were in home ownership, and one was living in a property provided by her former partner's employer. The initial housing situation of the other six participants was not known.

- After leaving the violent situation, participants reported a range of housing experiences; some moved through multiple types of accommodation or returned repeatedly to a particular tenure type in the aftermath of leaving. Collectively, they reported five stays in private rental, 14 in refuges, 64 in transitional accommodation, and four with family and friends. One woman had experienced a period of rough sleeping.

- The current situation of the participants was also varied. At the time of the interview, eight were living in private rental housing, and 12 were renting in social housing. One was living in a refuge and six were living in transitional housing. One woman was staying with family and friends.

Therefore, this small cohort's typical housing pathway before and after the decision to leave the violent relationship was from a private (most likely) or social housing (next likely) tenancy, to a social housing (most likely) or private (next likely) tenancy. Home ownership was not experienced by many when they were with their ex-partner, and none returned to this tenure after they had left, although one or two mentioned the possibility of a future property settlement and several aspired to future home ownership in lower-cost markets.

During the interviews we also asked participants about the services they had received, and all types of assistance received were recorded. Most had received a combination of housing

assistance (both short-term and long-term direct accommodation, as well as subsidies for private rental), and counselling, as well as material aid of various types. The forms of accommodation assistance received were refuge accommodation (15 women received this), transitional housing (11), private rental support (such as Start Safely or Rapid Rehousing) (nine), social housing allocation (six) and emergency accommodation (such as a motel stay) (five). Ten women were supported to see a psychologist or counsellor, five received help with furniture, and four, vouchers or food parcels. Only two reported receiving legal assistance.

It is worth emphasising that our participants, being recruited through services, had clearly received assistance. AIHW data on unmet need would suggest that many people who approach the SHS system for assistance do not have all their needs met, with the most significant area of unmet need being accommodation support—70 per cent of daily unassisted requests relate to assistance with accommodation (AIHW 2018b). According to the AIHW, the most common reason agencies reported for being unable to meet these requests was the lack of accommodation available at the time the request was made. One hundred and five thousand clients (38% of all clients) needed short-term or emergency accommodation and about two thirds of them (62%) received it. However, long-term housing assistance was provided to just 5,000 (5%) of the 96,000 (34%) SHS clients who requested it. Among clients experiencing DFV (106,000), 42 per cent (44,500 clients) needed short-term or emergency accommodation and 30 per cent needed long-term housing. Three quarters (75%) of the short-term accommodation needs were met, but only 5 per cent of the long-term needs (AIHW 2018a).

Importantly, our participants were not necessarily representative of the wider population of women leaving family violence. Some of this is probably related to the fact that our participants were recruited through service providers. Our sample therefore did not include sufficient numbers from some important cohort groups, such as Aboriginal women or women with disability, for us to be able to robustly compare their experiences with the rest of the participants. Drawing on practice knowledge and expertise through the interviews with service providers allowed us to compensate to some degree for this, but overall, the distinctive and significant specialised housing and support needs of these groups, and any gaps in provision that disproportionately affect them, may not be fully captured by this study.

2.2.2   Housing pathways: all SHS service users

We supplemented and contextualised our understanding of our participants' housing experiences with an analysis of AIHW data using the SHS data cubes. These data cubes include four point-in-time measures of a client's housing circumstances—housing, dwelling type, occupancy and tenure—which are recorded as they were first reported and last reported by the client. For the purposes of this report, the data has been filtered to show only female clients, aged 18 or over, with closed support periods, who have reported domestic and family violence as a reason for needing assistance.

On their own, the four measures of housing situation provide indications of women's transition whilst engaged with specialist homelessness services. The full tables for each are found in Appendix 1. Table 3 below shows the proportion of clients whose situation was the same at the time of last reporting as it was at the time of first reporting, for selected situations for each of the four measures. The situations shown are those which most commonly occurred (excepting 'invalid/missing').

Table 3: Proportion of clients for whom housing situation was the same at time of first reporting and last reporting, most common housing situations only

Measure of housing situation	Type of housing situation	Proportion whose situation was the same at first and last report (%)
Housing	No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	28.1
	Short term temporary accommodation	35.9
	House, townhouse or flat—couch surfer or with no tenure	38.3
	Public or community housing—renter or rent free	76.2
	Private or other housing—renter, rent free or owner	77.3
	Other—at risk	64.3
Dwelling type	House/townhouse/flat	87.9
	No dwelling/street/park/in the open	22.7
	Motor vehicle	20.6
	Emergency accommodation	27.2
	Hotel/motel/bed and breakfast	23.2
	Other	26.3
Occupancy	Leased tenure—nominated on lease	79.6
	Lease in place—not nominated on lease	46.3
	Couch surfer	32.2
	Living with relative fee free	51.9
	Other	42.4
	Boarder	36.3
Tenure	Renter—private housing	72.0
	Renter—public housing	72.1
	Rent free—private housing	41.1
	Rent free—emergency accommodation/night shelter/ women's refuge/youth shelter where rent is not charged	24.7
	Owner—being purchased/with mortgage	75.0
	No tenure	38.3

Notes: Data is national, for 2016–17, for female clients aged 18 and over for whom domestic violence was a reason for seeking assistance and for whom the support period had closed.

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Cubes

On the face of it, although there are examples where the majority of clients are experiencing no evident change in their housing situation between first and last report, these situations are also those where the original housing can be assumed to be relatively stable or suitable. Far lower

proportions of women initially reporting that they were living in housing that could be regarded as inappropriate or even homeless are still in those circumstances at last report. This could indicate therefore that services are succeeding in maintaining people in appropriate housing (i.e. they are not losing their accommodation due to violence) while supporting those who are in unsuitable or inappropriate housing to find alternative accommodation. To test if this was the case we conducted further analysis.

This analysis involved producing a combined cross-tabulation of all four measures of housing situation, and then aggregating the composite situations based on reasonable assumptions (see Appendix 2 for more detail). This has allowed us to group the housing situations experienced by women into one of five categories—institutional settings (including jails, psychiatric facilities, aged care and rehabilitation); inadequate shelter (primary homelessness or 'rooflessness'); in shelter, but shelter that is inappropriate or insecure or both; housing that is adequate, appropriate and secure; and situations where the information available for most or all of the factors is inadequate (mainly because of missing or invalid data) and we are therefore not able to apply our assumptions. Our assessment of appropriateness was based on whether such housing would be suitable for long-term residency—thus while transitional accommodation may be in good condition, safe and relatively secure, it is not a suitable long-term option for a household and therefore households in transitional accommodation were classified as 'poorly housed'. The findings of this exercise are reported in Tables 4–7 below.

Table 4: Final housing situation by initial housing situation, numbers of clients

Initial housing situation	Final housing situation					Total
	Institution	Not housed	Poorly housed	Well housed	Status uncertain	
Institution	149	20	148	97	114	*528*
Not housed	18	485	507	400	318	*1,728*
Poorly housed	134	271	7,875	4,635	6,056	*18,970*
Well housed	3	4	134	1,532	539	*2,212*
Status uncertain	75	172	2,155	11,292	15,396	*29,089*
Total	*379*	*952*	*10,818*	*17,955*	*22,422*	*52,527*

Notes: Data is national, for 2016–17, for female clients aged 18 and over for whom domestic violence was a reason for seeking assistance and for whom the support period had closed.

Source: Calculated by the authors from AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Cubes

At the time of first reporting, the largest numbers of women were either poorly housed (18,970) or in situations that could not be conclusively classified within our analysis. Relatively few were well housed (2,212). This had changed by the time of last reporting—although large numbers reported poor housing (10,818) or could not be classified, a much higher number were reporting being well housed (17,955).

Table 5: Final housing situation by initial housing situation, proportions of clients

Initial housing situation	Final housing situation (% of clients)					Total (%)
	Institution	Not housed	Poorly housed	Well housed	Status uncertain	
Institution	28.3	3.8	28.0	**18.3**	21.6	*100*
Not housed	1.0	28.1	29.3	**23.2**	18.4	*100*
Poorly housed	0.7	1.4	41.5	**24.4**	31.9	*100*
Well housed	0.1	0.2	6.0	**69.3**	24.4	*100*
Status uncertain	0.3	0.6	7.4	**38.8**	52.9	*100*
Total	*0.7*	*1.8*	*20.6*	***34.2***	*42.7*	*100*

Notes: Data is national, for 2016–17, for female clients aged 18 and over for whom domestic violence was a reason for seeking assistance and for whom the support period had closed.

Source: Calculated by the authors from AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Cubes

However, Table 5 shows that, when considered by their first reported housing situation, the percentage in each group who end up well housed is in almost all cases relatively small. Well under half of participants who began in institutional settings, without shelter or in inappropriate housing ended their support periods well housed (see shaded column). The obvious exception is those who were well housed in the first place—69.3 per cent of those who began receiving support while well housed ended as well housed.

Given the large number of women whose housing status was uncertain on the data available, these clients have been excluded from the calculations reported in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6: Final housing situation by initial housing situation, proportions of clients, clients with uncertain status initially and/or finally excluded

Initial housing situation	Final housing situation (% of clients)				Total (%)
	Institution	Not housed	Poorly housed	Well housed	
Institution	36.1	4.9	35.8	**23.3**	*100*
Not housed	1.3	34.4	36.0	**28.4**	*100*
Poorly housed	1.0	2.1	61.0	**35.9**	*100*
Well housed	0.2	0.2	8.0	**91.6**	*100*
All	*1.9*	*4.8*	*52.8*	***40.6***	*100*

Notes: Data is national, for 2016–17, for female clients aged 18 and over for whom domestic violence was a reason for seeking assistance and for whom the support period had closed.

Source: Calculated by the authors from AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Cubes

Table 7 underlines the finding from Table 6 that that being well housed initially was a major determinant of whether a household ended up well housed at the end of support—once the 'status uncertain' households are excluded, the proportion of households well housed prior to

support who were also well housed after support increases to 91.6 per cent, compared to much smaller proportions for other starting housing situations. Nearly two thirds (61%) of those starting out poorly housed had not changed their situation at the end of support. However, although a third (34.4%) of those who had started out without shelter remained without shelter at the end of support, most of the others had improved their situation, either obtaining shelter (even if inappropriate) or, in the case of just under a third (28.4%), becoming well housed.

Table 7: Initial housing situation by final housing situation, proportions of clients, clients with uncertain status initially and/or finally excluded

Initial housing situation (% of clients)	Final housing situation				*All*
	Institution	**Not housed**	**Poorly housed**	**Well housed**	
Institution	49.1	2.6	1.7	1.4	*2.5*
Not housed	5.9	62.2	5.9	6.0	*8.6*
Poorly housed	44.0	34.7	90.9	69.6	*78.7*
Well housed	1.0	0.5	1.5	23.0	*10.2*
Total (%)	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*

Notes: Data is national, for 2016–17, for female clients aged 18 and over for whom domestic violence was a reason for seeking assistance and for whom the support period had closed.

Source: Calculated by the authors from AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Cubes.

Table 7 inverts the picture in Table 6 by showing the proportion of clients beginning support in particular housing situations by their *final* housing situation. Reflecting the relatively lower number of women who initially reported good housing situations, it shows that only 23 per cent of those who ended up well housed had started that way—69.6 per cent of those who ended up well housed had been poorly housed before. However, 90.9 per cent of those who ended up poorly housed had been poorly housed before and 62.2 per cent of those who ended up not being housed at all had also been in this situation at the start of support.

In summary, the data suggests that the most important determinant of someone's post-support housing situation may well be the housing situation they were in prior to commencing support. The obvious inference is that overall housing market position is mostly unable to be changed during the process of receiving support. Services can move people who are entirely without shelter into some kind of housing, but there is little movement from here into stable, long-term, appropriate accommodation. This suggests that specialist homelessness assistance is not functioning as a mechanism for moving people along housing pathways. The qualitative data from our study (Section 3.6) suggests that this is primarily a consequence of the chronic shortage of exit points from the sector.

2.3   Implications for policy development

The SHS sector plays a critical role in providing assistance, including access to shelter, for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The information provided by services as part of national data collection processes suggests that demand is high and sustained. However, SHS providers are frequently unable to meet requests for long-term accommodation assistance due in large part to the systemic lack of such accommodation in a form accessible to clients.

In designing policy responses to women and children leaving their homes due to DFV, policy makers need to take this broader context into account. The SHS system as a whole is under considerable pressure, and much of that pressure derives from the lack of realistic and appropriate exit points into stable, long-term housing for all clients, including those affected by DFV, once they have entered the system and received initial crisis assistance.

3   Service integration

'Integration' is widely regarded as desirable and necessary for effective DFV responses, although there is still a lack of clarity around what it can or should mean or how it is best achieved. In Australia, it has been enacted through collaborative governance structures and the redesign of systems to promote coordinated responses across agencies, enable information sharing around safety and risk, and improve capacity in non-specialist agencies, especially police.

This research found that at a day-to-day practice level, integration is less about specific initiatives or programs and more about productive, mutually-supportive working relationships between agencies and/or workers. For service users, support from a capable, caring and well-connected case worker is crucial; rudeness, disrespect or a lack of empathy on the part of frontline personnel discourages women from seeking assistance.

While many aspects of the service system work well, there are gaps, including inadequate legal assistance, delays in access to counselling and other services, and constraints on the length of time that women can receive intensive assistance.

Policies and practices in other areas of government can act to undermine integration and work against the needs of women and children trying to leave violent relationships. In particular, the research identified:

- inadequate income support payments that leave women and children living in poverty and unable to afford decent housing;

- limited protection and assistance for migrant women sponsored to come to Australia by men who later become violent and abusive;

- challenges at the intersection between the child protection and family violence systems, particularly where lack of housing prevents women from regaining custody of children taken into statutory care; and

- Family Court decisions that trap some women in unaffordable housing markets to enable their violent ex-partner to continue to have access to children.

Integration may be ineffective when it results in the dilution of specialist expertise and experience and it may be difficult to achieve in small rural communities where there is limited availability and coverage of critical services, including police.

However, it is the lack of connection between the DFV support system and the wider housing market that creates the greatest problems. Existing programs are not able to compensate for the absence of affordable, suitable housing, so moving from short-term emergency or transitional forms of accommodation into permanent, stable, independent housing is extremely difficult, and sometimes unachievable, for women and children affected by DFV.

3.1 Why is integration important?

There is growing recognition that because domestic and family violence is a leading cause of homelessness, service responses that provide support for needs relating to both the experience of violence and the experience of homelessness are needed. Service integration is one way of providing these responses. 'Integration' emerged in the US in the 1960s as a response to the needs of people who had multiple, complex problems and were poorly served by a service system that had been grown rather than designed, and which was fragmented and complicated (Agranoff 1991). Its underlying premise is that although a lack of services can create difficulties, so too can a 'siloed' system in which discrete providers work in isolation on single problems without information exchange, either about mutual clients or about their work in general (Bromfield, Lamont et al. 2010). The solution is a system in which communication, cooperation and collaboration ensure accessibility, efficiency, minimal duplication of effort, consistent decision making and continuity of care (valentine, Fisher et al. 2006; ALRC and NSWLRC 2010; Zweig, Schlichter et al. 2002). However, as Breckenridge, Rees and colleagues (2016: 28) argue, although '[t]here is broad support in research, policy and practice that integration is necessary to prevent the harms caused by service fragmentation', what kind of integration and how far it should be extended are less clear.

In Australia, the task of integration is complicated by federal and sectoral governance structures. As Jones, Phillips and colleagues (2007: 8–9) put it, '[t]he integration "problem" in Australia involves the need to bring about policy and service coherence in a system involving three levels of government, a large number of state organisations, and significant roles played by the state, community, market and informal sectors in service provision'. This must all occur in a geographical context in which immense distances and a dispersed population create significant practical barriers.

Defining integration is not straightforward. The use of the term in policy and academic discourse has been described as 'a confused array of descriptive, normative and explanatory theory' (Halley, quoted in Jones, Phillips et al. 2007: 8); its use can be vague, imprecise and highly contextualised, but it nonetheless has normative and symbolic power (Jones, Phillips et al. 2007: 8–9). To provide some conceptual clarity, Fine, Pancharatnam et al. (2005 [2000]: 4) propose a continuum model, with integration located at one end and autonomy at the other. Jones, Phillips and colleagues (2007: 9–10) propose an alternative definition—that integration refers to

> structures and processes that attempt to bring together the participants [sectors, organisations or people] in human services systems with the aim of achieving goals that cannot be achieved by those participants acting autonomously and separately. These goals include greater coherence and cohesion, efficiency, effectiveness and consumer accessibility. These structures and processes may occur at the policy or service delivery levels, or both, and can involve several different modes [approaches] and instruments [mechanisms] of integration.

Integration is prominent in the domestic and family violence reform agenda, although how it is operationalised varies widely. A meta-evaluation of integration programs identified the following common elements: an interagency model enabling case coordination, information sharing or multi-disciplinary service delivery; the involvement of the police as either lead or partner agency; the inclusion of measures to address housing issues, such as a safe at home model; and multi-agency risk assessment and safety planning for victims (Breckenridge, Rees et al. 2016: 18). Yet regardless of the form of integration, implementation is not straightforward. valentine, Fisher and colleagues (2006: 424) identify the importance of 'time, resources and commitment'; to achieve success, there needs to be 'purposive processes and mechanisms to build and maintain relationships…Integration requires that existing structures will be changed. Unless

participants are empowered to challenge current power structures in planning, management, and service delivery, new integrative practices will not be effective'.

valentine, Fisher and colleagues (2006: 426) also make the important point that '[t]he logic of integration implies that problems remain unsolved because services are fragmented'. Sometimes this is the case—but sometimes it is not. In general, 'there is a discrepancy between the lack of a body of evidence of improved client outcomes and the high level of ideological commitment to integration from many practitioners and policy makers' (Jones, Phillips et al. 2007: 36).

In relation to DFV, the contribution of integration to program success is often left untested in evaluations, possibly due to the practical difficulty of measuring it (Breckenridge, Chung et al. 2016: 20–21), and consequently the evidence base on its effectiveness is limited (Breckenridge, Rees et al. 2016: 3; valentine, Fisher et al. 2006: 417). Fundamentally, DFV responses must also address basic issues of economic security and housing to be genuinely effective (valentine and Breckenridge 2016: 35). This is partly because DFV and other complex problems like substance misuse and mental health disorders are often situated in a context of housing disadvantage and low income (Bromfield, Lamont et al. 2010: 1), but also because while housing and income are not DFV-specific needs, access to them is, like DFV itself, gendered (valentine and Breckenridge 2016: 42 and passim).

In the contemporary social housing sector, dispersal of supply amongst multiple providers, shrinking resources, tighter targeting and greater policy interest in the achievement of non-shelter outcomes has created pressure for housing services to better integrate with non-housing providers (Phillips, Milligan et al. 2009: 52–53). Yet integration is not automatically enabled: roles and responsibilities in relation to homelessness caused by DFV continue to be contested by policy makers (Gander and Champion 2011). valentine and Breckenridge (2016: 31) argue that top-down, government-driven integration is problematic in the DFV sector in any case, as decades of feminist research and advocacy on gendered violence has pointed to the role of the state itself in enabling and perpetuating that violence. They propose the concept of the 'coordinated fragmented state' as an alternative. This is a model in which government and non-government agencies 'form responses in specific, local contexts'—a localised 'coordinated hybridity' built on a 'plurality of approaches' and the ongoing enabling of agency, critique and reflexivity (valentine Breckenridge 2016: 31, 34; Edwards 2009). According to Van Est (2016: 6–7, 18), the most important service delivery priority is 'empowerment'—defined as 'being heard and believed, regaining autonomy and agency of one's own life, realising your choices and recognising and defining abuse and control'—and she argues that the quality of the relationship between client and service is as important as the service itself.

3.2   What does integration look like in context?

The policy mapping exercise that began this research project identified integration as a common feature across all jurisdictions. As can be seen from Table 8, all jurisdictions have introduced formal governance structures to provide advice to political leaders and/or coordinate responses across government agencies, and have focussed on centralising referral and case management services to promote integrated delivery of services. These initiatives have been accompanied by measures that seek to promote information sharing—primarily, but not exclusively, in relation to safety—and improve the response capacity of other services, particularly police and statutory child protection agencies. Despite the focus on centralised delivery, some states are encouraging local input into implementation or are piloting strategies at the regional level first before expanding them elsewhere. It also appears that integration is conceived of as being strongly contingent on data, and there are several initiatives directed at data collection, although this is not consistent across jurisdictions. There is limited evidence of independent evaluation.

Table 8: Indicative integrated responses across jurisdictions: governance, key initiatives, data and evaluation

Jurisdiction	Response	
National	*Governance*	Implementation Executive Group (ImpEG) (Australian, state and territory government and non-government membership, supported by expert advisory/working groups and a National Plan Secretariat)
	Initiatives	1800 RESPECT (telephone and online counselling delivered through Medibank Health Solutions; includes 1800 RESPECT Triage Model, introduced in August 2016, and specialist trauma counselling component)
		Centrelink Domestic and Family Violence Strategy 2016–19 (includes actions on risk identification, referrals to support services and Crisis Payments to affected 'customers', and consideration of a 'safety flag' where DFV concerns have been identified)
		National Domestic Violence Order Scheme (operational from 25 November 2017: state-issued protection orders now nationally recognised and enforced regardless of jurisdiction; includes provision for existing orders to be registered)
		Development of National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions
	Data, evaluation	Australian National Research Organisation for Research on Women's Safety (ANROWS)
New South Wales	*Governance*	Ministerial portfolio for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
		Domestic and Family Violence Framework Interdepartmental Steering Committees
		NSW Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Council (government and non-government 'alliance' promoting integration and shared understandings)
	Initiatives	Domestic Violence Line (statewide telephone crisis counselling and referral for women)
		Safer Pathway (service coordination strategy/reform, incorporating common Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool, electronic referral management via Central Referral Point, statewide network of Local Coordination Points, safety action meetings regarding high risk cases, and information sharing provisions, available to female and male victims)
		Regional Domestic Violence Coordinator program (existing, to be expanded to include safety action management in trial sites)
	Data, evaluation	No specific initiatives identified

Jurisdiction	Response	
Victoria	*Governance*	Family Violence Steering Committee (high level, specialist advice to Ministers and Social Services Taskforce)
		Family Safety Victoria (new coordination agency)
	Initiatives	Support and Safety Hubs (centralised, localised entry and referral points with multi-disciplinary intake teams and specialist workers and capacity to directly allocate flexible support packages)
		Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (allows information sharing without consent in certain circumstances for risk assessment/management within a 'trusted zone' of organisations, supported by a Central Information Point which will integrate data currently held separately by Victoria Police, the courts, Corrections Victoria and Department of Health and Human Services)
		Integrated Family Services (wraparound support for parents and children, delivered via NGOs)
		Family Violence Command (specialist unit in Victoria Police for responding to DFV, sexual assault and child abuse)
	Data, evaluation	Development of Family Violence Index (development of a family violence indicator, commissioned from ANROWS and being developed with the University of Melbourne)
		Development of Family Violence Data Clearinghouse (with AIHW) and Victorian Family Violence Data Framework and redevelopment of Victorian Family Violence Database
Queensland	*Governance*	Domestic and Family Violence Implementation Council (independent oversight and monitoring)
	Initiatives	Integrated response trials in three locations (including Indigenous community trial at Cherbourg) including multi-agency High Risk Teams supported by new information sharing legislation (first stage of evaluation to be completed mid-2017)
		Housing services 'case panels' specific to child protection and DFV to provide 'holistic' responses
		Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing Guidelines to permit appropriate information sharing among government and non-government agencies working in the DFV area
		Police Service DFV Coordinators (to be developed over time into specialist practitioner roles)
		Inclusion of specialist DFV workers in Family and Child Connect and Intensive Family Support Services
		Vulnerable Persons Training Package for all police officers and selected support staff to improve skills
	Data, evaluation	Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Unit (research and data collection, part of Office of State Coroner)
		Whole-of-strategy evaluation framework in development by Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Queensland

Jurisdiction	Response	
Western Australia	*Governance*	Western Australian Family and Domestic Violence Senior Officers' Group (established 2007, a.k.a. Family and Domestic Violence Governance Council) (senior representatives from state government and the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services WA, tasked with planning, implementing and monitoring a whole-of-government response to DFV)
		Family and Domestic Violence Community Sector Roundtable (a.k.a. Family and Domestic Violence Advisory Network) (specialist services, community sector and government representatives, providing advice to Senior Officers' Group)
	Initiatives	Multi-agency case management (case-by-case information sharing and development of multi-agency safety plans)
		Family and Domestic Violence Response Teams (partnership between Department for Child Protection and Family Support, Western Australia Police and community sector, supported by a shared database)
		Family and Domestic Violence Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (implemented in 2011)
	Data, evaluation	Independent reviews of DFV-related fatalities and restraining order issues by Office of the Ombudsman (implemented in 2012)
		Whole-of-strategy evaluation framework under development by Curtin University
South Australia	*Governance*	Women's Safety Strategy Chief Executive's Group, chaired by Minister for the Status of Women and supported by working groups on Prevention, Provision (of services), Protection and Performance
		Women's Safety Services South Australia (government-funded, result of a government-sponsored amalgamation of Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Central Domestic Violence Service and Migrant Women's Support Services)
	Initiatives	Family Safety Framework (interagency collaboration, including NGOs, on integrated support for families; includes data-sharing about high risk families, a common risk assessment process, and regular family safety meetings about individual high risk cases)
		Multi-Agency Protection Service (MAPS) (commenced 2014 with colocation of staff from key government agencies: information sharing, risk assessment, coordination of responses to high risk cases; funded expansion in 2016 to include NGOs)
		Information Sharing Guidelines (developed in 2008 for children and youth and expanded to cover adults in 2013)
		Violence Against Women Collaborations (government/non-government partnerships to develop local strategies and capacity for prevention of and responses to DFV: regional action plans, supportive housing allocation and complex case management)

Jurisdiction	Response	
	Data, evaluation	Domestic Violence Serial Offenders Database ('watch list' database of abusive men, hosted and managed by Ninko Kurtangga Patpangga [NINKO] Southern Regional Aboriginal Family Violence Service, in operation since 2014)
		Research officer position based within Coroner's Office to review deaths related to domestic violence and make specific recommendations (in place since 2011, now maintains the Coronial Domestic Violence Information System)
Tasmania	*Governance*	Family Violence Cabinet Committee (chaired by Premier with membership from relevant Ministers)
		Family Violence Steering Committee (reports to Cabinet committee; chaired by DPAC with heads of agency membership)
		Family Violence Consultative Group (expert advisory body of key service providers and community sector organisations)
	Initiatives	Family Violence Response and Referral Line (24/7 telephone service triaging callers to either police or counselling/support)
		Safe at Home (criminal justice response and intervention coordinated by Department of Justice, established 2004, reviewed 2014: pro-arrest, pro-prosecution, prioritises women and children remaining in or returning to family home, supported by Integrated Case Coordination ensuring coordinated approach to risk and safety management and 'seamless' service provision)
		Victim Safety Response Teams (specialist police teams responsible for responding to, investigating and prosecuting DFV cases and assisting victims)
		Safe at Home Information Management System (facilitates information-sharing between Safe at Home agencies, developed from 2011; upgrades, particularly for management of high risk families, undertaken under Safe Homes, Safe Families strategy)
		Safe Families Coordination Unit (fully operational from June 2016: statewide collaborative unit, based on South Australia's MAPS, to gather and assess family violence information to facilitate integrated service responses)
		Strong Families—Safe Kids strategy (child protection system redesign) includes integration between DFV and child protection systems and formal relationship between Safe Families Coordination Unit and new Child Safety Advice and Referral Service
	Data, evaluation	No specific initiatives identified

Jurisdiction	Response	
Northern Territory	*Governance*	Domestic Violence Directorate (established in Department of Attorney-General and Justice to coordinate governmental implementation of Safety is Everyone's Right strategy)
		Local Implementation Reference Groups in Alice Springs, Darwin, Katherine and Tennant Creek
	Initiatives	NT Family Safety Framework (information sharing, consistent risk assessment and family safety meetings; first introduced in 2012 under Alice Springs Integrated Response project and since expanded to other locations)
		Implementation of SupportLink (IT product from ACT-based provider: referral framework management system for police)
	Data, evaluation	No specific initiatives identified
Australian Capital Territory	*Governance*	Coordinator-General for Family Safety (established in 2016–17 Budget, commenced operation on 31 October 2017, subsuming existing Coordinator-General for Domestic and Family Violence role)
	Initiatives	Family Safety Hub (integrated, multi-agency service: needs, safety and risk assessments, referrals, case management, information management and information sharing, to work in close collaboration with Human Services Gateway and child protection intake service, to be established using a whole-of-government and whole-of-community co-design process led by C-G)
		Further development of information sharing protocols, including exploring legislative provisions needed to expand child protection information sharing to all family violence matters and providing ICT and related administrative resources
		Development of a common risk assessment tool to be used across government
		Dedicated Family Violence Order Liaison Officers within ACT police
	Data, evaluation	ACT Domestic and Family Violence Data Project (aims to improve data collection on DFV in the ACT)
		Development of a family violence death review mechanism

Source: Authors. Compiled as part of desktop policy review undertaken during research (Section 1.4).

At the service level, there has been significant system level reform, including in some instances radical overhauls of how services operate, the introduction of new models or agency amalgamation. Many of the gaps being addressed are those between correctional and therapeutic responses, ensuring that women moving through the criminal justice system are supported and that services can more easily share data to minimise risk. There are also efforts to build knowledge, capacity and skills in relation to DFV among police officers. Awareness of risk and risk assessment in general is informing responses, and there are measures to triage high risk cases into more active forms of management, such as safety action meetings or multi-agency case conferences.

Many jurisdictions have initiated 'safe at home' programs; in Tasmania, this model is situated at the centre of the governmental response and is legislated through the state's Family Violence Act. Where therapeutic services are concerned, the overall emphasis is on outsourced delivery via the non-government sector, and the use of practice models that enable flexibility, tailored support and 'wraparound' styles of provision. Different jurisdictions have adopted different positions on the continuum from centralised to localised coordination.

Given the importance of intersectionality, especially the intersection of race, Indigeneity and cultural diversity with gender, we reviewed the policies and initiatives designed to support women from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities (Table 9). Specific governance or service responses for Indigenous communities are reasonably common across jurisdictions, but initiatives for migrant communities are less prominent. In both cases, a number of the initiatives are linked to cultural change programs.

Table 9: Jurisdictional initiatives specific to Indigeneity or cultural and linguistically diverse communities

Jurisdiction	Indigenous communities	Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
Commonwealth	Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (established May 2012, membership body for Indigenous family violence prevention legal services providers)	Change to partner and prospective marriage visa sponsor requirements for (effective November 2016: sponsor must provide police clearance and disclose criminal history to applicant)
		Family Safety Pack (resources for new arrivals to Australia with information on Australian laws on DFV, sexual assault and related issues: available in 46 languages; associated fact sheets with information for workers and interpreters on use of interpreting services)
New South Wales	No specific initiatives identified	

Jurisdiction	Indigenous communities	Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
Victoria	Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a Safer Future for Indigenous Families and Communities — 10 year plan (released 2008) Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework (released 2012) Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum (established 2005, key driver of Strong Culture, Strong People and Strong Families) Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups (leadership role in implementing DFV responses in Aboriginal community)	inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (case management and legal support)
Queensland	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group (appointed by Domestic and Family Violence Implementation Council)	No specific initiatives identified
Western Australia	Freedom from Fear Action Plan 2015: Working Towards the Elimination of Family and Domestic Violence in Western Australia (launched September 2015) includes action plan (Safer Families, Safer Communities: Kimberley Family Violence Regional Plan) specific to Kimberley region focussing on Indigenous family violence	No specific initiatives identified
South Australia	Ninko Kurtangga Patpangga (NINKO) Southern Regional Aboriginal Family Violence Service (previously called Domestic and Aboriginal Family Violence Gateway Service) (telephone-based information, advice, support, assessment and referral, housing support, counselling, delivered by Women's Safety Services)	Migrant Women's Support Program (delivered by Women's Safety Services)
Tasmania	No specific initiatives identified	
Northern Territory	Indigenous Male Advisory Council (meets four times a year to discuss DFV) Indigenous First-Language Family Violence Prevention Project (under development through Northern Territory Men's Policy Unit)	No specific initiatives identified

Jurisdiction	Indigenous communities	Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
Australian Capital Territory	Aboriginal Domestic Violence Safety Plan (culturally-appropriate resources for victims and perpetrators) ACT Justice Reinvestment Trial (targeting Indigenous households affected by DFV: family focussed approach to reducing Indigenous over-representation in justice system)	Additional funding for translation and interpretation services for those accessing courts, tribunal and specialist DFV services

Source: Authors. Compiled as part of desktop policy review undertaken during research (Section 1.4).

3.3 Is integration working?

The case for integration was put very clearly by one service provider interviewed for this research, who argued that current systems do not support people in crisis because they are too complicated, and that the practice of ascribing challenges to the complexity of client need is incorrect:

> I hear the term all the time 'complex clients'. I hate it. Any individual is going to be complex to some extent, but the client isn't where the complexity is. The complexity lies in the service system. We've built a complex system to respond to some very simple needs. And complexity when applied to a client is often misused. It's about a multiplicity of needs, not necessarily a complexity of them. The client, the poor old client, at a time of crisis has to negotiate a complex service delivery system. That's a recipe for disaster. It's hard to do research when you're in crisis. Your brain's bouncing from here to there. You're not thinking straight, you're panicking, you're worried, you're distraught. It's not a good time to be trying to discover and work out how to navigate an unfamiliar process.

However, integration as an abstract principle or an object of strategic reform is surprisingly understated in the transcripts. Some service providers described 'the system' as a continuum of support or a defined referral and assistance pathway, and specific initiatives were mentioned: interviewees welcomed the greater attention being given to DFV issues—though some were critical of the emphasis and especially funding priorities evident in implementation—and in NSW, initiatives like Safety Action Meetings[2] were hailed as a substantial improvement. In Tasmania, where a series of aligned structural reforms have occurred, there were signs of reasonably functional cross-system referrals between Child Safety (the statutory child protection service), Gateway (family support services) and Housing Connect (the housing assistance 'front

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[2] Safety Action Meetings (SAMs) are one component of Safer Pathway, the NSW framework for DFV assessment, referral and service coordination (see Table 8 above). SAMs are held regularly and are intended to prevent or lessen serious threats to the safety of DFV victims and their children through targeted information sharing. SAMs are chaired by a senior police officer and attended by key government and non-government service providers working with domestic violence victims and perpetrators in the local area (NSW Government, 2018). In Tasmania, the Safe Families Coordination Unit fulfils a similar function. The unit is led by Tasmania Police and employs investigators and analysts from different government departments to undertake inter-agency case assessment of families experiencing family violence to provide early identification and support to families at risk, as well as to support prosecution of offenders. According to research participants, the SFCU is focusing primarily on 'the top 10%' of the most high risk families as assessed by police, which equates to some 300 families a year.

door'). There was also evidence of liaison across jurisdictional boundaries, allowing women moving interstate to escape the perpetrator to obtain support and of brokerage funding allowing flexibility with some of the associated costs. One worker noted improvements in information flow now that 'we're one big happy family with [government agencies]'.

3.3.1 Integration is about relationships

For many services, integration appeared to operate at a localised and immediate level through the provision of a place—a refuge or a service contact point—where women leaving violence could come and quickly receive some kind of accommodation assistance and appropriate levels of support and which could, further down the track, provide a base from which they might easily connect with other resources in the community.

> So somebody coming here saying I need to escape, I need to move, we can put them in emergency accommodation right there and then that day—a couple of nights, slow it all down, get you safe, let's start talking, link you in with support and try and work out the best way forward. (worker)

This form of integration is very much perceived and conceived of in human, interpersonal and relational terms. Workers speak of relationships with other agencies as facilitating more comprehensive responses to clients:

> We have good liaison with the social workers in the schools.

> Services in this area do work well together.

> We work closely with many partners.

> We do sort of support each other if there is something going on, and if we can help each other, we definitely do.

> The networking and the partnerships that we have are quite strong, so it's easy to pick up the phone and talk to each other.

> We've got a very good relationship with the police.

Yet this reliance on good interagency and interpersonal connection was also a point of vulnerability:

> Sometimes it comes down to the relationships that the services have with Centrelink workers—we have the outreach homelessness Centrelink workers and most of them are just miracle workers, but it's hard to tap into them all the time.

> We've just had such a hard time over domestic violence liaison officers, so you form a relationship, a working relationship with one and then they end up burned out because they're just not given the proper support, debriefing, resources, being in that system, and so they just get churned up and spat out.

For their part, service users talk about workers who have helped them with 'everything'. This support includes specific actions, such as driving a woman and her children to the park; helping them learn how to use a computer; providing emotional support; coordinating tasks that require writing letters, attending appointments or lodging forms; paying for fuel; connecting them or their children into classes and activities; reminding them of appointments, negotiating repayment plans with creditors; providing referrals to counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists; or supplying clothing for children, but it is more often described in blanket terms:

I'd be lost without them.

They were with me like family.

She helped in any way she could.

It's changed my whole life.

That's hours and hours, so yeah, they've done a lot for me.

Even now, I wouldn't probably survive without seeing [worker].

Just like 'voom', with big arms, the help was there and a lot of tools, a lot of information. Freedom to ring and ask a question if I was in doubt about anything.

I haven't needed to go anywhere else for support.

Service users also expressed sympathy about the demands their support workers were under, even to the extent of seeing this pressure as an explanation or justification for poor practice:

She said that she'd have a place for me when I got out, but she didn't, but I also reckon it's because she's got a huge caseload. They need more workers there. She's got so much, like the poor woman is run off her feet, and there's a few times she's dropped the ball, but it's not her fault. Her caseload must be massive. I've never seen her sit down, except to do stuff for someone else. The poor woman doesn't have time to breathe. Yeah, she did help a lot.

A number of service users were grateful for assistance they had received which was 'not part of their [the worker's] job' or to which, under a strict interpretation of the rules, they were not entitled. But in other cases, a worker's willingness to push the boundaries could extend to interventions that could conceivably have been experienced as paternalistic or invasive. One refuge worker described a colleague:

The other case worker, she does living skills. So she will actually go out and make sure the women are cleaning the house. She bin dives and makes sure everyone's putting the right things in the right bins. It's really funny actually. She does all that living skills with them, which is good. It teaches them how to maintain the property and pay the rent, things like that.

And not every client was effusive about every worker:

Certain services are very touchy about the service that they provide and how they think they're going. That's certainly been my experience. They don't like being told that they're not doing a good enough job. You can end up like me where—I've been dismissed from services and having genuine issues with them. They just think, oh we can't help you or we're not going to help you, and that's a real problem. My experience with all of this, not just housing, has been that the services are so—there are so many, fragmented and they don't work well together and often compete. They're certainly contradictory.

It is evident that a lot depends on individual workers' abilities, engagement and connections. Where these things were not in evidence, experiences were poor. While the experience of specialist DFV services was mostly described in very positive terms, service users drew attention to the attitudes of service providers in other agencies, especially those in housing services. When highly vulnerable clients experience rudeness, a lack of empathy and impatience, this has a corrosive effect and may discourage clients from seeking help in future.

I can't blame the Department of Housing but I do blame them about the way they speak to people. It's disgusting.

It's not inspiring and it's not helpful and it's not empowering at all. They're bloody hard on you. And they're nasty, and you know it goes right from Centrelink through to you know, a legal—your own legal adviser.

Some service providers were similarly angered by the lack of compassion from workers in other agencies:

I think the service needs to understand what these women are going through and how frightened they are and how at a loss they are. They can't necessarily move on. And you're treating them as if they're annoying. Or you don't get back to them when you say you will. Or you just don't have anywhere for them or what you have is a crap suburb and it's not a safe house—it's like, come on!

And Housing New South Wales, they are working on it, but sometimes our clients go down there and because of the responses they get at the front desk, they just don't want to go back.

Although DFV strategies in most jurisdictions incorporate measures to smooth the intersection between police and DFV support services, our findings suggest there is still work to do, especially with respect to some officers' attitudes to or understanding of DFV. Although designated liaison officers were praised for their contribution, their knowledge, skills and capacity had not always flowed down to first responders:

I know we contact police and if they know that there has been domestic violence happening all the time, they sometimes don't even attend. (worker)

My sister, she's finally got out of a relationship and she's in a house now and she had someone throw a brick through her window two or three nights ago. She rang the police at 2.30 in the morning; they said, 'we'll send a car by'. She sat up terrified all night waiting for them to come until morning and they didn't even come. (service user)

I tried—we had police around twice, and I tried to do the police violence order and both times they listened to him [the perpetrator], both times they ignored me. (service user)

In terms of the police, we find a real variety in terms of how general duty officers will respond to DV, and how informed they are about DV, whether they'll even take action on an AVO that's clearly being breached because they assess that the women appears to be there of her own volition, which is entirely beside the point and it's very much a subjective kind of application of the AVO. (worker)

And I do think fundamentally it's the police that call this. If they truly had a zero policy towards domestic violence, life would be a lot different to a lot of people. At the end of the day they are the community upholders of a certain standard, and until they respond to every neighbour ringing and saying 'there's shouting and yelling going on next door, I'm really worried' and deal with it, not just tell them to quieten down, then it's going to go on and on. They think everyone else has got the skills they've got in terms of their own assertiveness. (worker)

In certain places, communities or contexts, mistrust and poor past experiences with police intervention reportedly affected people's willingness to call on the police for assistance, even though police contact is required if women wish to access certain types of DFV assistance (such as crisis accommodation brokerage in Tasmania).

In [location] there isn't a lot of connectivity between the people and the police, they don't tend to go to the police. So because there aren't the statistics, there's no funding and so there's massive, massive gaps. (worker)

It depends what police officer you get, because if they don't have the understanding of the violence, if we've got a lady that's come to our area for safety, and we apply for the AVO, if it's not done the correct way it discloses that it's happening in this town. It may not be an address, but it will disclose the town. (worker)

Service providers also described working with newly arrived families whose experiences with police in their countries of origin have been violent or otherwise harmful, and the impact that police intervention can have on those families.

3.3.2 There are still gaps in the system

Beyond poor interpersonal skills or a lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of practitioners, frontline service staff and the police, participants pointed to more systemic gaps in the system. These included a lack of accessible advice and support to assist women with complex and often extended legal processes:

A huge gap from my point of view is for women who part own or own a home with the partner and they've left the home. The Safe at Home legislation says a woman should be safe in her home but most of the women that we work with have left the home because of family violence. He's still in the family home, and so the difficulty women have from there in terms of housing and assistance with property—because there's no legal aid funding for property matters and sometimes there's not enough equity in the home to pay the lawyer at the end of proceedings. (worker)

We still don't communicate, we communicated through lawyers. Lawyers' fees is a really hard one. I went to Legal Aid and they said that we can't help you, and that's because he'd already gone to Legal Aid so it's really complicated. I just feel like it's unfair that the abuser gets all the free stuff and you're made to try and find someone else. (service user)

Referrals to other forms of assistance were largely readily available but waiting times for appointments were a significant issue in many areas. Service providers and service users described unmet need for counselling and psychology services for both adults and children, as well as for financial assistance and other services. They described the damaging impact of having to wait for essential support on people who were in crisis and reported that bureaucratic application processes for some types of support made things worse.

When you're homeless, you don't have time to wait. It's very stressful. You need to know where you're going to be sleeping that night. You're constantly in fight or flight mode. It's really stressful. So, processing times, and making sure people are dotting their Is and crossing their Ts, is not something that you're capable of doing, because you're constantly stressed out, you've got a million things running through your head, you don't know how to communicate properly, and then someone comes along and says, oh no, we've forgotten to do this. Then, you're like, oh my God, it's like a house of cards being pulled down, it really is. If someone doesn't process something properly, then that's okay, they get to go home at the end of the day and lay their head on their nice bed. We don't know where we're going to lay ours. (service user)

I get that forms need to be filled in. I understand that, but is there some way we can cut down the red tape and make the forms shorter? Make the processing time shorter. Why have you got to fill out the same question three times, in three different places,

just to have one thing happen? It's just double handling, and when you're leaving DV, it's got to be quick. (service user)

Because the place at which most women first accessed the service system was frequently a crisis accommodation provider such as homelessness shelter or DFV refuge, their initial experience of support was inherently time-limited, although the precise time varied depending on service practice and local demand. Service providers and service users alike argued that although some women did not require extended support, many did, and a standard six week or three month 'support period' in an SHS was not long enough.

When we see people in the women's shelter sometimes they're not really ready for counselling, they're more—when you're homeless, you can't think of anything else. (worker)

Six weeks here is not long enough because you find by the fourth week they start having some clarity about what they want and what's best for them. (worker)

For some women, even relatively long periods of intensive support were not adequate.

I cried my heart out the day they left, like I really did, I didn't think I would, but I was just like 'Oh'…

Interviewer: Why was that? Because they have a time limit on case work or something?

Participant: Yeah, they have a year. And they gave me a year and then they actually extended it, which they usually don't do, they extended it for an extra three months to help try and get my daughter back to school, but that just didn't work. (service user)

The issue of inadequate support periods is linked in part to the amount of work required from women once they do engage with support.

I think part of the problem is that if you write a list of all the things they've got to do in those first few weeks it's incredibly long, especially if they've got to get a new bank account, they've got no income, they're going through the Centrelink process of claiming payments, which is really long and arduous. So they're just a few of them. Then they've got the meetings. They've got meetings with workers here, meetings with their housing support workers, going to Housing Connect to change their details and put applications in. Then going to some counselling and if they've got to go to mediation regarding the kids and then legal, getting legal advice, it just—there's just so much on that list that they feel totally overwhelmed. (worker)

As one worker put it, 'there's only so much a woman can do—we're asking a lot of them'. And for some service users the 'box-ticking' they were required to participate in was stressful, exhausting and sometimes diametrically opposed to their own priorities.

I realised that there was no way that I could keep up physically with the rigours of going from one appointment to the next and often there were two appointments that were conflicting with one another to try and get housing, to try and get somewhere to stay. (service user)

I walked in and they said, 'okay you're here, we'd like to do a budget with you'. What the fuck am I budgeting for? I'm living in a motel, what do I write down here? And I'm paying 360 bucks a week for three nights' accommodation and I'm sleeping in my car on the weekends, not knowing where the hell he is. (service user)

The lady I had last week that I'm working with, she said at several points through the day through several meetings with different agencies: 'Fuck it! I might as well go back to [location] and let him kill me. I can't be dealing with this shit anymore. I'm over it. I'm so exhausted. No one's listening to me.' (worker)

3.4   Integration across government

The policy logic of integration is based in a rhetoric of whole-of-government responses and cultural change ('it's never okay'). The implication of this is that when it comes to DFV, all aspects of government interaction with women should be consistent with safety and freedom from violence. However, the degree to which all agencies and institutions of government are aligned on this is questionable, and our interview data highlighted income support, immigration, child protection and the Family Court as areas where the policy agenda frequently worked against women trying to leave violent relationships.

3.4.1   Income support policy

Although few service providers explicitly linked the low incomes of their clients with government policy decisions, many of them pointed to the impossibility of attaining ongoing secure, affordable and stable housing when women were reliant on government pensions and benefits.

The average person with no debts owing on a Newstart Allowance, their affordability is assessed at $120 a week. We can't even get a room for $120 a week so never mind the Newstart payment supporting a woman who's trying to get her children back into her care through Child Safety services. The requirement may be that they need a two or three or four bedroom property and you can't get that on a Newstart Allowance. (worker)

The effect of living on a low income translated into experiences of poverty, going without and relying on emergency relief:

Sometimes it's hard. I opt to use the free service at the community centre. On a Thursday, Friday you can go and get some free vegetables and some bread. There is another one at [location] that I would like to go to, but because of TAFE, I can't. They have free fruit and vegies, free bread. I'm not sure if they have free milk or not. (service user)

Well, $400 per week, $50 for electricity and then you've got $50 for fuel in case she [daughter] misses the bus—I have to have that for safety. And then we have $100 to spend on food a week and you've got a 16 year old and a five year old, and then I also pay $116 a fortnight, so that's $60 per week on child care, so I can go to work. (service user)

Mum said to me this morning, 'Are you going to get your heater on?' I was like 'Oh', like my bill would be so huge, I don't really cope at the moment with it, I'm always behind. (service user)

Other aspects of income support policy were also raised as issues for women leaving violence. The provision that penalises those moving to an area considered to offer fewer employment prospects was highly problematic for women who needed to go elsewhere for safety reasons. Similarly, the provisions which move single parents from parenting payments to Newstart Allowance once their youngest child turns eight presented a significant future obstacle.

Nor were Centrelink staff thought to always facilitate the best outcome for women. Service users reported delays in approval of payments like the single parents' payment, partly due to the

length of time required to process paperwork. Perpetrators could take advantage of the restrictions of the Centrelink system to further control and restrict women's choices.

> *Getting a single parenting payment's fine but then getting your family tax A and B, phew, that could take ages to work that one out because—the partner saying, no he hasn't got the kids anymore, is he going to say that? (worker)*

> *Centrelink payments are extremely restrictive for some people, especially if you've got a partner in a farming situation who won't release the financials. The woman can't go on Centrelink payments because you've got an interest in a rural business, you've got to show your tax returns, you've got to show your yearly income, you've got to show your assets. And Centrelink often won't budge. (worker)*

> *I believe Centrelink needs to step up. Because the biggest worry is money. Because you need a roof over your head—that basic pyramid of need is not being met. So we get that right and then you can move on from that. (worker)*

3.4.2   Immigration policy

Several service users we spoke to reported past or present issues with immigration status. Service providers in a range of different locations said this was a significant, growing problem creating considerable difficulties for services as there were few funding streams specifically allocated to support these women.

> *We often get the—and it's the only way to describe it, unfortunately—but the mail order bride. So older husband, mail order bride, younger, sometimes without any residency, usually brought in on an incorrect visa, no rights. Shelters are very reluctant to take them because there's no exit points, there's no money, there's—do you know what I mean? (worker)*

A recent Australian Government legislative change to require prospective sponsors to disclose their criminal history to their new partner (see Table 9 above) suggests these predatory patterns of behaviour have been recognised, but on their own such changes may not achieve much for the women already here (or arguably always prevent other women from taking the chance). Where women without permanent residency are entitled to assistance, the income available to them is lower than other income support payments, and the effective marginal tax rate much higher.

> *I don't want to be on Centrelink payments forever. It's very embarrassing to be on Australian payments. I was working when I arrived here and got my bridging visa, I worked as an aged care cleaner and a housekeeper in a nice hotel. So, when I left my ex-partner, I lost my job up there. I have been working, so it feels bad—I can't work because Centrelink is going to get all the money that I am going to earn. On my visa, I'm on a special payment benefit. I'm not on a payment—I have to wait for two years to apply for a payment. (service user)*

Service providers indicated that supporting women in these situations was resource-intensive and frequently not fully funded.

> *It's incredibly difficult and it's like reinventing the wheel in every case because every case is different. So you make lots and lots and lots of phone calls and often don't make a huge amount of progress. It's good if you've got somebody who's here on the right sort of visa or might have had a child who can access some sort of special benefit. But sometimes they are people who can't access any funds at all. (worker)*

The plight of women from New Zealand, many of whom had spent extensive periods of time living in Australia and who felt connected to and part of the Australian community, was a

particular concern for some providers as recent changes now prevented them from accessing any kind of support.

> *For someone like me to be saying to people, 'I can't help you', I just…and the difficulty is a lot of the refuges are trying to take them in, but there's only so many they can afford to take in. People are looking to us for assistance because you've got homeless women escaping DV with children, we've got to be able to do something with them. New Zealand residents are another issue as well. New Zealand residents are a huge issue because we can't help them at all. (worker)*

Beyond the question of income, women in these circumstances were extremely vulnerable, especially if their precarious visa status intersected with other issues, such as poor English, or where deportation might mean separation from children.

> *It's just done as a way of kind of controlling that relationship, but when you have someone say, 'I'm going to kick you out of the country by giving the Department of Immigration a call', that can be quite traumatising. (worker)*

> *We don't have any migrant resourcing on the ground so you've got to use the telephone services or sometimes they'll bring a friend in, but again it's a very small community and so it can be problematic. And often they can get deported and they might have a child and it's just—it's really awful but to see one of them walk in, it's almost dread because it's just not going to end well. (worker)*

More broadly, there is a lack of capacity in some mainstream services to work effectively with women from culturally and linguistically diverse and, to a lesser extent, Indigenous backgrounds. Partly this arises from language barriers, and the difficulties of arranging safe, affordable interpretation, but there is also a disconnect between the cultural norms and values of some communities and the ethos on which many services operate.

> *One of the big things I think for services, DV services, is that you know initially they were saying 'oh you know you can't do, men can't do, no, that's called family violence and da, da, da', coming from this feminist aspect. And I could see the look on everyone's faces and they were just shutting down, pulling back, going no way, we're not going there, you're going to tell us to leave our husbands and our children and they're going to tell us this and they're going to tell us that. You can't come at it from this full-on feminist perspective, because it's so far removed from what these people are coming from. (worker)*

In Tasmania, where legislation defines 'family violence' as occurring explicitly between partners, there is no legislative basis for a DFV intervention in quite serious cases of violence within households if the violence is perpetrated by another relative, such as an older son or brother or a mother-in-law. Service providers interviewed suggested that conceptualising family violence as purely a question of intimate partner violence did not map easily onto family structures in other cultures where gender roles and patterns of familial authority were defined differently and in the absence of a male partner, authority in the household passed not to the mother but to the male children. Although some services tried hard to be sensitive to cultural nuance, there were few resources to enable them to do it effectively.

> *I think it's getting our head around people's culture and so then when we know we've got a woman coming in and their culture, it's probably doing a bit of Googling and knowing what to expect and what they're wanting so that we can respect them. Getting the right information to support these women. And if we've got women who can't speak English that's even harder. (worker)*

We also see a high number of Indigenous women—technically I guess you would call it non-engagement. But I think we're working really hard to try and make sure that we're supporting them in an appropriate way. We're working with the Aboriginal service around that because their needs are different. We need to be mindful not to make the assessment that they're not engaging and they're not willing to do the work; sometimes we just need to change our approach. (worker)

3.4.3 The statutory child protection system

The intersection between family violence legislation and child protection provisions means that exposure of a child to family violence can be grounds for a child to be removed from a parent's custody. Though this may be necessary to protect a child from further harm, it creates further layers of guilt and distress for women who are themselves victims of violence.

Child Safety are good at it you know, they're good at questioning the women, why didn't you protect them? I did, that's why I rang the police and you still took my children away from me. I rang the police. What do I do? What do I do? (worker)

Participants reported that for women who had lost custody of their children, the experience of trying to meet statutory requirements for reunification, especially around the provision of an appropriate quality of housing, was frustrating and difficult.

[Statutory child protection agency] have really, really unrealistic expectations of the properties around [location]. For example, you'll have a single mother, one child—[the agency] will expect that mother, or that victim, to be able to move into a property with a backyard, a fully fenced backyard. I've had that a number of times. (worker)

The Department of Housing could not help me with anything to do with my children when I got out of rehab because my children were no longer on the lease because they didn't live with me. Even though they were my children, they were coming to my home and the only way I could get this stuff done to my house was until my children were put on that lease and they didn't understand the concept that I needed this done before my children could come home. (service user)

These women's experiences resonate with the findings of recent research on how the lack of a 'poverty-informed practice culture' in relation to child removal and reunification can lead to unnecessary delays in reunification and deepen the hardship and difficulty facing families trying to win back custody of their children. In particular, a lack of stable housing creates a barrier to reunification even if all other issues in relation to parenting behaviours and other risks have been met (Fidler 2018).

3.4.4 The Family Court

Although this research was not about Family Court policies and processes, several interviewees raised issues around the intersection between the provisions in parenting orders and women's capacity to obtain good housing outcomes. This relates particularly to cases where shared care determinations mean that women are tied to specified locations, including unaffordable housing markets, or are forced into extended and costly travel on a regular basis to enable access.

Women have to travel ridiculous distances to provide the ex-partner with access to the child. So a woman who lives in [town], who's in a shelter, who doesn't have a licence, who has to catch the bus to [another town] with her five-year-old every fortnight so her abusive ex can have child access. (worker)

I can't leave the [region] without consent from him and consent from the court. (service user)

From the perspective of some service providers, Family Court processes were barriers to integrated support:

> There's a lot of rhetoric about we're funding this service and we're funding that service and we're doing this and domestic violence has got to stop. But when you have a woman with children up against a fairly clever or at least a very entitled and wordy, mouthy perpetrator, police and mediators and the Family Law Court and all of these services will give way to the perpetrator. (worker)

3.5 Sometimes integration doesn't work

Beyond service gaps and the failure to align other areas of government policy with DFV policy goals, some data pointed to circumstances where integration may not be effective or feasible.

First, there is a difference between a specialist service response, that preserves and concentrates expertise, knowledge and capacity, and a generalised, 'no wrong door' model that seeks to ensure that any service contact can lead to the provision of appropriate support. Historically, DFV services, including refuges, have insisted that specialist expertise is necessary if women are to receive appropriate support.

> The most critical thing that women need is a specialised service that understands family violence. Any other service can move people but they won't do it in a way that puts in context for the woman around safety planning, impact on her, impact on the children and all of that conversation occurs while they're helping them, so while they're moving them they'll be doing all this other talking. (worker)

In Tasmania, a recent policy change to up-skill generalist support workers to respond to family violence survivors has enabled Housing Connect, the homelessness 'front door', to cope with increased demand and difficulties with specialist recruitment. But it also attracted criticism from other services.

> I think it's [the policy] in response to how government is working. Like with the police, it's integrated, you know. But while it may be integrated it doesn't mean that there's going to be a better service or there are going to be more skilled people. (worker)

In New South Wales, integration has meant a similar generalisation of what were specialist services. Rather than a specialised funding stream for domestic violence services, all services are now funded through the homelessness service system. This had had at least one unintended consequence:

> With the change in the way that the funding was delivered and who delivers the services now, there seems to be a huge gap in service delivery for women who are experiencing domestic and family violence, but who are not necessarily at risk of or who don't identify as at risk of homelessness. Of course, that family violence service is now being provided by a specialist homeless service. There is a very strong perception for a lot of women, that if they're not at risk of homelessness or don't identify that, they don't fit the criteria for support.

Secondly, integrated responses are harder to deliver and less realistic in small or regional centres. Partly there are difficulties with ensuring women's safety when 'so many people know where the shelter is', as one service user put it, but the smaller economies of scale in regional communities are a more significant barrier—they mean limited social housing supply, small, if potentially more affordable, private rental markets, restrictions on service delivery and sometimes even constraints on policing.

The last straw was housing. We were running out of the building kind of thing with fear and the woman at [service] that arranged the stay at the [hotel] said—it was close to four o'clock, right? And nothing—no acts of violence happen after four o'clock, I've discovered. No, no, no, well, everybody shuts down at four o'clock so you just have to hold onto everything until the next working hours—and literally we were there by four. (service user)

We don't have 24-hour policing, we have a limited overnight policing service and also we don't have 24-hour secured accommodation for them. They don't have the services that they need to give them the therapeutic change. Why send a woman who's got a domestic violence issue to a place where there's not 24-hour policing? (worker)

The close interpersonal networks in many small communities can be advantageous, but the same feature can also create problems, as in these contrasting perspectives:

I think it's been quite successful in regional areas. There's a couple of factors where you might have services that have really been able to foster really good relationships with local real estate agents. There's some really great examples of people using those relationships to find housing. You've got real estate agents who are really championing the program. (worker)

The real estates sort of get to know...We're a very small town, once they're not looked on kindly by the real estates, we've got no hope of getting them even that. (worker)

3.6 Integration and housing

As this chapter has already indicated, the research identified a number of areas where integration was not working as effectively as it could for women and children leaving DFV. However, our data made it clear that the most prominent, widespread and problematic hole in the system was and is the lack of affordable, long-term, secure and stable housing.

You can email the housing delegate and ask her to organise that and she could get priority being put forward as a serious risk at Safety Action Meetings, but if there's no properties, it doesn't matter what priority list you're on, there's no properties. (worker)

3.6.1 Integrated housing support in policy

The findings of the desktop policy review suggest that housing provision has only a peripheral role in the policy and strategic response to DFV. Almost all jurisdictions have provisions in their residential tenancy legislation to assist women to more easily assume a tenancy from an excluded perpetrator, although the terms and conditions vary somewhat from state to state—WA is the only state with no reference in its residential tenancy legislation to DFV at all (see Table 10). But although most states have some housing-related initiatives, there are few that are substantial or broadly-targeted enough to counter the systemic shortfall in affordable housing supply or the multiple barriers that face vulnerable households, including women leaving violence, to access the housing that is available. Few states have made a concerted effort to be strategic in how they address women's need for ongoing safe, secure and affordable housing following DFV (Victoria and Tasmania are partial exceptions).

Table 10: Housing responses within DFV policy: legislation and key initiatives

Jurisdiction	Response	
National	*Legislation*	No relevant housing specific legislation identified.
	Initiatives	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) identifies women and children affected by DFV as a 'national priority homelessness cohort'—supporting bilateral agreements have been signed with NSW, QLD, SA, TAS, ACT and NT
		NHHA bilateral agreement with SA includes commitment to develop draft national standards improving safety for and tenant rights of women experiencing DFV and living in the private rental market
		Women's Safety Package (2015 federal funding commitment expanding existing services especially safe at home programs through Keeping Women Safe in their Homes initiative, and new initiatives such as safety-promoting technology, services in remote communities and respectful relationships education)
New South Wales	*Legislation*	*Residential Tenancies Act 2010* (includes provisions terminating tenancy of a perpetrator prevented from entering a property due to a protection order, with provisions allowing remaining occupants to become tenants or terminate a fixed-term agreement without penalty; some protection from landlord-initiated termination if it would cause undue hardship to a child or the victim; right to change locks where a protection order is in place; removal of requirement to reimburse perpetrator for forfeited bond)
	Initiatives	Start Safely (time limited i.e. 3–36 months of subsidy assistance in private rental market, with same eligibility as for social housing and a requirement that the housing be 'affordable', i.e. rent less than 50% of income post-subsidy)
		Staying Home Leaving Violence (safe at home program, operates in 27 locations, to be expanded to five additional sites)
		Domestic Violence Response Enhancement (funding providing emergency accommodation and/or support 24 hours a day, seven days a week 'where geographically possible' to women and children leaving DFV)
		Replacement of communal DFV refuges with 'core and cluster accommodation' (model to be piloted in Orange for evaluation)
Victoria	*Legislation*	*Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (includes provisions terminating tenancy of a perpetrator prevented from entering a property due to a protection order, with associated provisions requiring landlord to enter into a tenancy agreement with victim(s), allowing for term of agreement to be reduced in order to avoid undue hardship to victim or perpetrator, and preventing victim from being cross-examined by perpetrator in any associated tribunal hearing; right to change locks where a protection order is in place)
	Initiatives	Family Violence Housing Assistance Implementation Taskforce (oversees implementation of housing and homelessness reforms, including Safe at Home)
		Family Violence Housing Blitz, plus additional funding for improvements to and expansion of crisis housing and for longer term options including public housing and private rental head-leases

Jurisdiction	Response	
Queensland	*Legislation*	*Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008* (includes provisions allowing victim to apply to tribunal to be recognised as tenant instead of perpetrator or for victim to apply for termination order if tenant is perpetrator; requiring tribunal to take existence of protection order into account in decisions about termination orders due to damage or injury caused by perpetrator; and requiring tribunal proceedings where domestic violence is an issue to be held in private)
	Initiatives	Funding for additional specialist shelters under *Housing Strategy 2017–2020 Action Plan*: responsibility for shelter administration moved from Department of Housing and Public Works to Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services
		Keeping Women Safe in Their Home (trial of new and emerging technologies to improve safety for women remaining in their own homes funded under Australian Government's Women's Safety Package)
		Housing services case panels specific to child protection and DFV to provide holistic responses
		Provision of flexible assistance packages for women leaving DFV to support independence and provide housing choice
Western Australia	*Legislation*	*Residential Tenancies Act 1987* (contains no references to family violence or restraining [protection] orders)
	Initiatives	Funding for refuges that can accommodate larger families, including older boys
		Safe at Home (implemented 2010)
South Australia	*Legislation*	*Residential Tenancies Act 1995* (includes provisions allowing for termination of an agreement where protection order is in place and both perpetrator and victim normally live at property concerned, for victim to then be recognised as tenant, and tribunal to order perpetrator to pay compensation to landlord; giving tribunal powers to issue a restraining order prohibiting tenant or their associates from causing serious property damage or personal injury or a family violence offence)
	Initiatives	Significant structural reform underway to reintegrate functions previously undertaken by Renewal SA and Housing SA under a new statutory authority, the South Australian Housing Authority
		NHHA bilateral agreement includes commitment to redevelop service model for Aboriginal family violence services
		Staying Home, Staying Safe (delivered by Women's Safety Services, part of a broader Safe at Home policy framework: home safety audits, home security packages and safety planning assistance; expanded in 2016 with federal funding and now partnering with SA housing authority to provide consistent approaches to social housing tenants)

Jurisdiction	Response	
Tasmania	*Legislation*	*Family Violence Act 2004* (includes provision for court to order that if a protection order is made and perpetrator is a tenant, the residential tenancy agreement is terminated and a new, identical agreement established with victim as tenant; a Bill before Parliament seeks to amend this provision to allow the agreement to be terminated without a new one being established)
		Residential Tenancy Act 1997 (provisions permitting tenant to change the locks without authorisation if protection order is in place and was made to protect tenant; and terminating agreement in the event of appropriate order being made under the Family Violence Act)
	Initiatives	Tasmanian Affordable Housing Strategy 2015–2020 (some measures overlap with Family Violence Action Plan)
		Safe at Home (criminal justice response and intervention coordinated by Department of Justice, established 2004, reviewed 2014: pro-arrest, pro-prosecution, prioritises women and children remaining in or returning to family home, supported by Integrated Case Coordination ensuring coordinated approach to risk and safety management and 'seamless' service provision)
		Safe Choices (through CatholicCare: practical planning and support for people wishing to leave a violent relationship, face-to-face initially in South Tasmania only but expanding statewide, statewide telephone and online service)
		Rapid Rehousing (head-leased, subsidised pool of private rental properties to be made available for families leaving violence or needing to exit shelters—model has been evolving since implementation)
		Funding for redevelopment of Hobart Women's Shelter incorporating five new units
		Housing Connect regional forums (designed to improve/coordinate response to women seeking housing assistance due to DFV)
Northern Territory	*Legislation*	*Residential Tenancies Act* (provisions explicitly excusing tenant who is victim from vicarious liability for what would be a residential tenancy agreement breach carried out by perpetrator)
	Initiatives	Network of safe houses for women in remote communities
		NHHA bilateral agreement includes initiatives to provide range of short, medium and long-term accommodation options, with associated services to support access, retention and transition, for women and children affected by DFV
Australian Capital Territory	*Legislation*	*Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (provisions allowing, in cases where protection order is in place, for termination of a residential tenancy agreement and/or requiring replacement tenancy agreement with victim as tenant; allowing early termination, with at least eight weeks' notice, of agreement if not doing so would cause significant hardship to tenant, including in cases of family violence; permitting tenant or other person living at premises to change locks without authorisation if they are a 'protected person' under a protection order)

Jurisdiction	Response	
	Initiatives	Housing ACT Domestic and Family Violence Manual, updated in 2015 to ensure agency's DFV response is appropriate
		Safer Families Grants Program (pilot brokerage fund offering grants of up to $2,000 for eligible bond loans scheme applicants who need additional financial help to leave a violent relationship, as well as fast-tracked access to bond loans)
		NHHA bilateral agreement includes commitment to funding for immediate safety responses and a safe at home pilot

Source: Authors. Compiled as part of desktop policy review undertaken during research (Section 1.4).

Largely, women leaving DFV are faced with the same issues as those affecting other vulnerable groups in the community: there is a fundamental lack of social housing supply, and even where there is social housing available it is highly targeted; the private rental market, though variable according to geography, is a precarious alternative if households lack income. Vacancy rates at the affordable end of the market are low and rents are high relative to incomes, while marginalised groups are subject to a range of discriminatory practices by landlords; housing markets are segmented by location and affordability, which means that much of the affordable housing supply is poorly located with respect to services, transport and employment opportunities; and frequently housing and locational disadvantage is overlaid by the additional burden of territorial stigma.

Given the significance of these difficulties, one of the principal weak points in the integrated response to DFV is the lack of integration between DFV services and criminal justice responses and the housing market more broadly. Ideally women who leave their home due to DFV receive crisis assistance when they need it, but long stays in brokered emergency accommodation or refuges are inappropriate. Moving frequently amongst crisis, emergency and transitional housing options is also problematic for victims, especially if the result is frequent changes to children's schools (or varied and difficult commutes to get to the same school) and the inability to find stable employment and build connections to the community. Avoiding these undesirable situations requires timely access to stable, independent housing. But it is clearly the case that one of the most significant problems facing services—and therefore, facing their clients—is the lack of long-term, secure housing following a crisis, and this is critically affecting the futures of victims and their children. It may also pose risks to safety (see Chapter 5).

3.6.2   Integrated housing support in practice: crisis responses

Most of our interview participants who had left violence reported that emergency accommodation was made available quickly. Services operate on an immediate response basis in most jurisdictions, and temporary accommodation may be provided by government agencies, SHS providers or other NGOs. In many cases this immediate response is achieved by agencies paying for motel accommodation. Refuges and shelters also provide relatively short-term accommodation. Transitional accommodation may be available for longer periods, typically between six and 18 months. Most women we interviewed had been in emergency accommodation, a refuge and/or transitional housing.

Brokered accommodation

The experience for many service users is accommodation in a motel for a day or two and then being sent to whichever refuge has a bed available. Refuges are typically full, and this was the experience for our participants. This caused delays sometimes for people seeking refuge accommodation—for example one young mother reported having to criss-cross Sydney for two months while being placed in successive forms of very temporary accommodation:

Participant: Every couple of days, they'd make me go back to housing [FaCS] and they put me in just like a women's temporary refuge. So like for three days, I'd stay in [suburb] and another three days, I'd go to [another suburb], another three days, I'd go to [another suburb]. So it was constantly circling.

Interviewer: So you did that for a month?

Participant: Yeah, about two months.

Interviewer: Two months!

Participant: And I was eight months pregnant with my daughter…

Interviewer: Oh goodness!

Participant: And I had my son and I had everything I could fit into the pram.

In NSW, it is a requirement that people needing emergency accommodation re-request this every two days.

Temporary accommodation in smaller towns is often problematic, especially if the perpetrator lives in the same town. As a worker based in a NSW regional town explained:

There's only like three hotels or something in town and they are based quite close to the highway, everyone knows you're in that accommodation anyway, so it's not really safe, you're not secure, and I've had cases where a client has been staying there and the perpetrator has just done a drive-by to each motel and found her.

This point was reiterated by other workers in regional towns. If male perpetrators were deemed homeless and in need of temporary accommodation too, there was a possibility they could be placed in the same temporary accommodation as their ex-partner. This was described by service providers as a rare but not unknown occurrence. In addition to these safety concerns, motels were not always staffed at night and felt unsafe for some women.

Some motel owners reportedly refused to let rooms to persons referred by Housing Connect (in Tasmania) and FaCS (in NSW) leaving poor quality motels as the only choice; these were described as 'grotty' and 'grim' as well as being unsuitable for women with children. On the other hand, services in Hobart reported good relationships with a number of motels and hotels and had even run information sessions with hotel staff so they could better understand domestic and family violence issues.

Sometimes events can create a sudden lack of emergency accommodation options, especially in smaller cities or regional towns where there are fewer motels. In Hobart for example, arts or food festivals as well as holiday periods such as Christmas and Easter could mean severe shortages of hotel-based emergency accommodation for women wanting to leave a violent situation. In such peak times, hotel or motel rooms became impossible to find, even on weekdays:

Literally everything was booked out. So we had to send the client out of the CBD area and even that was—it's hard. It's expensive, hard and I don't know if it's the right support for that client as well. And it becomes impossible over the holiday season or the on season for Tasmanian tourism. (worker)

This created tensions between angry and frustrated women seeking somewhere to stay and workers, who found it hard to source motel rooms or other options such as caravan parks in peak season. Services scrambled to find other options, or pre-booked hotel accommodation over holiday periods.

Refuges

Refuges and shelters are also used by women and children immediately after leaving a violent relationship or at other times. Refuges typically exclude women with teenage sons (or accept the woman but not the sons), pregnant women or young women under 18, but interviews with service providers indicated there was flexibility around this. Workers reported allowing women with teenage sons to stay, and some services chose to ignore this guideline as it was not their policy to 'split families up' provided there were 'no problems'. Flexibility was also extended to teenage mothers under 18, especially if local youth refuges excluded young people with children.

Refuges were highly valued by the service users interviewed, not only because they provided a place of sanctuary and respite, but also because they offered a location in which women could receive or be referred to other necessary services and support, including transitional accommodation if a refuge could make this available. And even though stays in refuges are technically time-limited (typically to about six weeks), workers indicated that even if the allowed time had elapsed, they would not ask women to leave if they had nowhere else to go. However, this does not necessarily convey security:

> *Just to be told when you go somewhere, oh well, you can only be here six weeks, but then no-one says we're not going to put you on the street, there'll have to be somewhere for you to go. I felt that they're just nervous all the time. (worker)*

A similar situation applied with transitional housing.

> *The good thing is I have somewhere to stay and the bad thing is that I guess it's temporary and I have to pack up and move again. (service user)*

One service user interviewed had felt pressured to move out of her transitional housing:

> *And the transitional houses are pretty much a shuffling game. Okay, you're housed for 12 months and you haven't found anything, well you go back into a motel, we still get the funding for you because you're homeless and we're helping you and we'll move somebody else who's homeless in a transitional house and then they haven't found anything.*

Previously, she had been forced, with her children, to sleep in a car after money for motel accommodation ran out.

While most service users spoke positively about their time in a refuge, some had found the environment, especially in older-style models where there are shared communal areas, to be daunting. Other types of housing do not have the challenges of staying in a refuge but bring other risks. Once women were placed in longer-term forms of accommodation, sometimes they missed the atmosphere and sociality of the refuge and felt isolated and lost:

> *I don't know, it's a bit strange, you lived with these people from nine 'til five everyday kind of thing and then all of a sudden, they're not there. (service user)*

Most, though not all, of the participants we spoke to felt safe at refuges. Despite efforts to keep addresses confidential, the locations of some refuges are known, especially in regional towns. Workers described security upgrades, the use of personal alarms, CCTV camera coverage and 24/7 monitoring. This kind of security was not always possible in transitional accommodation, however.

Refuge capacity was a recurring issue. All service providers we interviewed—in NSW, Tasmania, as well as representatives from organisations in Victoria and Western Australia—said that refuges were always full and 'struggling with capacity'. Acute shortages were reported in Tasmania, for example:

> *I mean I could easily have 20 more units. If they gave me 20 units tomorrow I'd fill them up, no worries at all and there'd be 20 people that we wouldn't have to turn away in that month. (worker)*

Similar difficulties were reported in NSW. There, women travelled longer distances (and sometimes from interstate) to find a bed in a refuge. Service users were aware of the demand and its effect on services:

> *The support services, they were great, but I have to say that sometimes it's extremely difficult to get into them because of the demand, the workload that those girls are under over there is just ridiculous. (service user)*

Pets were an important consideration for women wanting to leave a violent relationship. For many women, pets are much loved family members. If a pet was left behind, a perpetrator could harm it as an act of revenge or to exert ongoing control over their ex-partner. These fears could stop women from leaving:

> *I do have a client who needs to move and she is frightened of leaving and there's a lot of obstacles but one of those obstacles is actually finding care for her cat that she doesn't want to leave behind. (worker)*

> *We know how important companion animals are for women and children leaving DV, particularly if they've seen the animal being harmed by the perpetrator. (worker)*

Pets also served another function, as a 'safety alarm' or 'alert system' warning of potential intruders to a dwelling, and this protective watchdog function is important to women and children who have left DFV.

Some refuges provide accommodation for pets, and the importance of this kind of provision was a strong theme in the interviews with service users. Where refuges are not able to do this, there are sometimes alternatives available, but cost can be a significant barrier for women on very low incomes with little to no future certainty.

> *The RSPCA offer reduced rates for women escaping domestic violence but the last time I heard reduced rates were still something like $20 a day which is actually—I mean it's $77 for a woman to come here and they get fed and it's going to cost them $140 to keep their moggie. I mean there's something ridiculous about that whole scenario. (worker)*

> *Also back to the [pet boarding service], we found that the clients won't use them, because there's a fee. It's $10 a day for the animals. They can take forever to pay it back, but when the clients hear that, 'No, no, I'm not going'. It's a good service, but when the clients find out it's $10 a day, it's like—and they say there won't be a debt, they can pay it off forever, but still to have that, and they're escaping domestic violence—they don't leave.*

Exit points

The key issue for service providers, especially those working with clients in refuges, was the question of exit points. Refuge and transitional housing is intended to be short term, but stays were lengthening because of the lack of long-term options for women to exit into. One of the real estate industry representatives we interviewed described the systemic problems she observed in her area as follows:

> *I started seeing what ongoing impacts it has when women don't have access to stable, ongoing housing after they've left violence, and how it compacts, and the refuges are full, and then no one can get out the other side, because they can't get a private rental. And the Department of Housing is in such an atrocious state in [this area], that*

they can't get access to public housing. And then that leaves other women in danger, because they can't get into the refuge, because there's a backlog.

In some services, a condition of assistance was that clients had to take steps to find longer term accommodation, but this proved difficult, especially in areas with low vacancy rates and a high level of competition. Nearly half of the 28 service users we interviewed were currently living in social housing, indicating that social housing continues to be an important housing option for women leaving refuges. In this, however, our participants may not be typical. In Tasmania, residents in shelters who are eligible for social housing are automatically assigned to the top priority category on the waiting list, as part of a deliberate strategy to generate some movement through SHS accommodation, and so social housing remains a realistic exit point out of the crisis system in that state. But refuge workers in NSW rarely saw social housing as a viable exit point for their clients, due to long wait times and extreme targeting to need:

As I said, the refuges do a great job, but not every one of those people going to the refuge is priority approved, you know; there's not a lot of exit points. (worker)

In several areas in NSW, workers reported they 'never' or 'rarely' had clients housed in social housing. The rental subsidy program Rent Choice Start Safely was generally seen as a positive initiative that assisted women moving out of refuges, but its effect was dependent on the nature of the local housing market. In Sydney, services indicated that they steered women towards less expensive suburbs or tried to persuade women to go to unfamiliar areas by showing them the range of available rental properties in those areas. In regional NSW, workers reported encouraging clients to look for private rental housing outside of the area, including in other states and territories:

That's one of our questions when they first come in, 'Can you think of anywhere else in the country that you would be safe?' (worker)

Some women, such as those with poor rental histories or larger families, find it particularly challenging to find post-refuge accommodation. Women without permanent residency status and on visas that restrict their incomes may also take much longer to exit crisis or transitional housing—it can take up to two years to sort out visa restrictions, but during this time these women may have very little or no ongoing income, leaving refuges to meet the shortfall.

The lack of exit points is a common refrain in homelessness research. In 2008, Tually, Faulkner and colleagues (2008: 45) pointed out that 'the lack of exit points from shelters has turned many of them into much longer term accommodation options than they were/are designed to be'. The findings of our research confirm that little has changed. Moving women on from short-term crisis or transitional housing continues to be a significant challenge, due in large part to the restricted supply of social housing, the lack of affordable and accessible private rental housing, and the very limited incomes on which many women are forced to survive.

The way our system is set up is as a system of shelters for people, mainly for women, fleeing a violent situation and many of them with their children. And unfortunately, our capacity to offer suitable, affordable and safe housing options for these women has deteriorated over the last few years. On one income, it is now unaffordable for an adult to re-establish a home in a private rental market, which is really their only option for housing. Some of course, will attain social housing, but not anywhere near the numbers that need it. (stakeholder)

3.7 Implications for policy development

Overall, the findings of this research would suggest that integration is generally working well for service providers and service users, both as a principle guiding service delivery and as an

explicit aspect of policy and service design. At the level of encounter with the service system, women and children who seek assistance are finding the support they need. There are gaps, inconsistencies and shortcomings in the system, but where women have access to skilled, capable and well-connected support workers, these can be mitigated, at least partially—although where they cannot be, the consequences can be severe.

There is a shortage of short-term accommodation options in the immediate aftermath of leaving a violent relationship. This leads to women finding it far more difficult than it should be to obtain the sanctuary of safe and secure emergency housing. Were additional funding for refuges and other crisis models to be made available, there would be no shortage of demand to absorb it.

However, the primary source of pressure on the crisis system, and therefore the principal point at which integration is failing, is the interface, or lack thereof, between the DFV system and the wider housing system. Women leaving violent relationships are routinely unable to readily obtain safe, affordable, accessible and appropriate housing in which they can settle for the long term. Without this, they remain in crisis and transitional housing for longer than is appropriate, and the consequences of this are felt not just in their insecurity and uncertainty, but throughout the whole system. Resolving this situation will require substantive and extensive measures to improve integration between the DFV system and the housing system, especially in relation to social and affordable housing.

4 Housing and housing markets

The interviews undertaken as part of this research took place in NSW and Tasmania. Both these states are experiencing significant housing market challenges—Greater Hobart has recently overtaken Greater Sydney as the least affordable capital city market in Australia.

Women leaving DFV theoretically have three tenures available to them: home ownership, the private rental market and social housing. In practice, home ownership was out of reach of almost all participants in this research, most of whom had previously lived in the private rental market or social housing. Women who own their home and are victims of DFV may not use SHS and other services because they do not need them, or because they do not know about them. Better knowledge on the experiences of women who are 'invisible' to the service system would be beneficial and could be the subject of future research.

There are specific subsidies or programs available to assist women to access private rental housing, including the Rent Choice Start Safely subsidy in NSW, the Rapid Rehousing program in Tasmania, various state-based bond assistance programs, and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) at a national level.

Those interviewed suggested that private rental support is valuable in certain markets, giving women a degree of choice and flexibility and access to a greater portion of the market than they would otherwise have had. However, in other markets, where rents are high and climbing, the assistance provided is insufficient. Even if housing is affordable with the subsidy, once the subsidised period ends, the unsubsidised rent is unsustainable.

Women leaving violence may also face discrimination from landlords, even if they can afford rent. They may be unable to effectively compete with childless, working couples in tight real estate markets where landlords have many prospective tenants to choose from, and this can be compounded if they have a poor tenancy record due to the behaviour of a violent ex-partner.

Social housing remains an important housing option for many women escaping DFV, but the system is in structural decline and the properties available are subject to strict targeting regimes. For the service users interviewed, social housing was valuable because it offered stability and affordability, but some social housing neighbourhoods were perceived as unsafe and exposing women and children to additional distress and trauma.

4.1 Housing options for women leaving DFV

There are two main long-term housing options for women who have left a violent relationship and sought assistance from services—social housing and the private rental market. Social housing access is constrained by eligibility criteria, supply and suitability, but less so affordability because rents are set as a percentage of income. However, across Australia, it is

becoming increasingly different to obtain social housing in the absence of significant, multiple and complex needs, such as problematic substance use or a serious mental illness. Waiting lists are long, as are waiting times, and the supply is manifestly inadequate to meet demand.

Women leaving DFV are more likely to be vulnerable to housing insecurity if they are on low incomes and have dependent children, as are single person households reliant on income support. Their options in the private rental market are constrained by supply and affordability, which are related to local market conditions. Affordability can vary widely in different locations. Access to private rental housing is also dependent on being perceived as an acceptable tenant by prospective landlords, but in areas of high demand, a vacant property can attract many applicants, all competing to be the most 'acceptable'.

The two jurisdictions used as case studies for this research, NSW and Tasmania, have challenging private rental markets. According to the most recent Rental Affordability Index produced by SGS Economics and Planning, Greater Hobart has overtaken Greater Sydney as the least affordable capital city market in the country, although the Sydney market is still considered 'critically unaffordable to significant proportions of the renting population, especially very low and low-income households'. The regional NSW rental market is also considered unaffordable; in Tasmania, most regional areas are considered relatively affordable, although this is starting to change in some centres, like Launceston. In Hobart, the decline in rental affordability is so sharp, the indications are 'that on average rents in Hobart are unaffordable even to the median rental household. It means the average income household is on the verge of housing stress'.

For certain household types, the situation in the housing market in general, and these markets in particular, is extreme. For a single parent with one child aged under five and on parenting payment supplemented by casual or part-time employment, renting a two-bedroom property in Greater Sydney would take up to 70 per cent of household income. For regional NSW, the proportion is 36 per cent, which still exceeds the 'housing stress' threshold of 30 per cent. In Greater Hobart and the rest of Tasmania, the proportions of income needed to pay rent are 42 per cent and 30 per cent respectively (SGS Economics and Planning 2018: 5, 8, 16–17, 29). These are the market contexts in which many of the participants in this research were trying to locate or sustain stable accommodation.

Box 2: Housing assistance in the private rental market

The private rental market is an important and growing destination for those leaving crisis or transitional housing (such as that provided by SHS). Since 1993–1994, government housing expenditure on the direct provision of social housing has decreased and expenditure on demand-side rental subsidies has increased. Real expenditure on CRA grew from $3.57 billion in 2011–12 to $4.37 billion in 2015–2016 (SCRGSP 2017: Table GA.12).

Local market conditions can vary widely, with desirable and well-located areas experiencing tight rental markets. As a result, the effectiveness of subsidies like CRA also varies widely depending on the area (Randolph and Holloway 2007). In areas of high housing costs, subsidies will be relatively less effective in reducing housing stress, unless they are deepened to produce more affordability. CRA is paid at a flat rate across the country, and therefore those receiving subsidies like this tend to cluster in larger numbers in the outer suburbs or larger regional centres where housing costs are lower (Department of Social Services 2018; Randolph and Holloway 2007) rather than in the inner or middle ring suburbs of cities.

Subsidies like CRA or those administered by state governments, including rental subsidies, bond assistance or head-leasing programs that offer tenants a sub-market rent, defray the upfront and ongoing costs of private rental and therefore extend the number of properties that are affordable. This use of public funds to subsidise tenants' costs has been described as 'socialising' the private rental market (Parkinson and Parsell 2018). This is of course to the individual tenant's advantage, but there is a challenge, or even an inherent contradiction, in policies that try to make 'the market operate like a "non-market" or "hybrid" that provides greater opportunities for low-income and vulnerable households' (Hulse, Parkinson et al. 2018: 38).

Between 2001 and 2013, median rents increased by between 65 per cent and 100 per cent while subsidies such as CRA increased by only 40 per cent (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2014). When rents increase at a faster rate than CPI, but subsidies are linked to CPI, they become less effective. When this is a trend year on year, renting becomes less affordable in a given area unless incomes rise. CRA is capped at a maximum amount, and as King and Melhuish (2003: 6) note, 'the rent levels at which maximum rates of payment apply are relatively low'. While CRA used to effectively double the affordability of housing in 2003, it still left approximately one third of recipients paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent and therefore, in housing stress (King and Melhuish 2003). In 2015–16, the proportion of CRA recipients paying more than 30 per cent of income on rent after receiving CRA was 41.2 per cent (SCRGSP 2017: Table GA.27), suggesting that the capacity of CRA to make renting affordable is eroding at a national level.

Home ownership may be a third possibility for people leaving DFV, but there are many barriers to this, even for those for whom it is financially feasible. Some victims may be able to access equity from a previous home but be unable to do so immediately after leaving the violent relationship because it requires a settlement agreement with the perpetrator. Among the small sample of women we spoke with, only three had been in home ownership prior to leaving the relationship, and none were currently able to access equity. Nor were they in a financial position to purchase a property in the short term. Therefore, the only two realistic options for the 28 women interviewed were private rental housing and social housing. This would be the case generally for women on lower incomes who are leaving DFV. The housing and support experiences of the service users we interviewed, and the perspectives of service providers working in the DFV sector, are explored in the following sections.

4.2 The housing experiences of research participants

4.2.1 Housing histories

Service users' accounts of their housing histories indicated various experiences of private rental and social housing: some had lived in social housing as children with their parents or with their ex-partner or had their own tenancy but left it to leave the area. Most had a private rental history and described a range of experiences. Some said they had good relationships with landlords, while others reported problems with getting repairs done or being forced to move:

> I just found that things just fell apart in the place and no-one wanted to put their hand up. You're never secure because they might change their—well, he did. That's why I moved. After I rented with him for seven years, and it was subdivided, front to back, he goes, 'Oh, I just want the whole house back now', which he has done. (service user)

Some women had experienced being pursued for rent arrears after they had left a rental property because their ex-partner was in rental arrears or had stopped paying rent. One service user described this as a protracted issue, although it has now been resolved:

> The ex was there for probably another two and a half years after I left and ended up owing $10,000 worth of rent. The real estate didn't even make a new lease once I took my name off it. So the owner then wrote a letter, in my name as well, saying that this $10,000 in arrears, and it was an eviction notice, and he'll take it further and all this type of stuff. (service user)

Another issue was that DFV had caused noise and disturbance to neighbours, and damage to the property. Often women feared that they would be put onto a 'bad tenant' database such as TICA, and some had been.

The three who had experienced home ownership described a comfortable standard of living, making it all the harder to accept a reduction in living standards after leaving the DFV perpetrator. Social housing was a big step down in terms of housing quality:

> I left with a purse and the clothes on my back. It breaks my heart now still, but we come from six acres, farm, motorbikes, horses, car, everything to yeah, a housing house. Well, we don't have much at all. (service user)

Some of the research participants had experienced a period of homelessness, although only one had experienced rooflessness, having spent an extended period sleeping rough (in her car). Others had stayed with friends or family, sometimes in cramped conditions in a single room with their children.

4.2.2 The private rental market

Subsidies: Rent Choice Start Safely (NSW)

Since 2009, NSW has offered its own rental subsidy program, called Rent Choice Start Safely, to anyone eligible for social housing who is escaping domestic or family violence and homeless or at risk of being homeless. The subsidy is paid in addition to other entitlements, like CRA, and is available for up to 36 months. Eligibility for Start Safely is broader than for CRA as it is available to single persons with gross incomes of up to $60,800 (Sydney rate) with extra income amounts added for additional adults and/or children (FaCS n.d.). Entitlement is reviewed every three months. According to one worker interviewed, Start Safely was introduced in response to increasing pressure on the NSW social housing waiting list from applicants who were escaping violence and classed as in need but who were unlikely to be allocated social housing. It was also believed that combining housing assistance with other supports and encouragement to

undertake education or training and gain more financial autonomy would be more empowering for recipients.

Rent Choice Start Safely can be used anywhere in NSW, although those approved for the subsidy can only seek rental properties up to a certain rental limit, which is based on deemed affordability. 'Affordable' means the household would not be paying more than 50 per cent of income on top of CRA (FaCS n.d.). Deeper subsidies are available for specified areas, covering the most populous (and most expensive) areas of NSW[3]. The subsidy also increases for each additional household member, including children.

The advantages of Start Safely in providing relatively quick access to housing, locational flexibility and greater choice were recognised by research participants:

> *The beauty of Start Safely is if they need to relocate because of the violence or because of family support or because of work anywhere in the state, that product can be utilised. It allows them to pick somewhere where they feel safe. It allows them to find their own accommodation and then they're subsidised for up to three years. (policy maker)*

Start Safely was valued by the DFV-specific and other service providers participating in this study. It was considered vital in assisting women out of refuges or transitional properties and into private housing and was considered to work well for households with children. One regional service provider reported that '100 per cent' of people leaving refuges in the area did so with Start Safely assistance and that their clients would struggle with affordability without it. However, as noted in Chapter 3, in some areas even with the Start Safely subsidy the private rental market was unaffordable and this led to workers encouraging clients to relocate to other, cheaper areas. Workers also described managing clients' expectations of housing size and quality: those who had previously lived in a larger, better quality dwelling were sometimes aghast at the size and quality of the rental housing on offer.

Because affordability is assessed with respect to income, women on lower income support payments (such as Newstart Allowance) or living alone faced even more constrained options.

> *We have lots of women approved for Start Safely. It's not for single women, though. (worker)*

In one regional area, service providers said they recommended single women investigate shared housing as a more affordable option. In another, Start Safely was simply not seen as an option for single households.

Service providers had mixed views on whether it was advantageous or disadvantageous for clients to disclose the subsidy (or the reason for it) to real estate agents. Some said this was a red flag that prejudiced their clients' chances of being chosen as the successful applicant, while others thought the proof of extra income could positively influence real estate agents and landlords' decisions. Others adopted a more tactical approach, advising clients whether or not to disclose based on the perceived attitude of a specific agency or property manager.

Start Safely and other similar time-limited programs assume that the need for the subsidy will decrease over time as earnings will increase. Service providers reported that they considered this in their advice to clients, and said that Start Safely worked best for women with children whose income was likely to increase over time:

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[3] South Eastern Sydney, Northern Sydney, Sydney, Western Sydney, South Western Sydney, Central Coast, Nepean Blue Mountains, Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Mid North Coast, Northern NSW and Hunter New England (FACS n.d.)

It works if the person has a pretty realistic potential for either completing some study that's going to lead to a job, but if you've got someone who's got ongoing mental health like maybe PTSD or children with health issues or difficulty with study, then for them it's more difficult and what we try to do is be even more realistic at the beginning with whatever property they go into, so it's not the top of the affordability range, and they're going to be much more likely to be able to sustain it on benefits. (workers)

These calculations are important because, as one of the program goals is financial independence through employment, the subsidy starts to taper off over the three-year period. Women with high and complex support needs, mental health issues, or childcare responsibilities limiting their ability to work were more often directed towards social housing.

While other forms of private rental assistance, such as bond payments, are available in other jurisdictions, Rent Choice Start Safely is unique to NSW. No other state or territory had an equivalent subsidy at the time of writing, although the payment of a targeted rental subsidy was a recommendation of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Head-lease programs

Another form of subsidy for providing affordable private rental housing is head-leasing. Under a head-leasing model, a social housing provider enters into a tenancy agreement with a landlord and then sublets the property to a tenant, sometimes at a sub-market or even income-linked rent. The latter gives the tenant similar affordability to a social housing tenant, though without the long-term security of tenure. A service user who was housed under this arrangement described it as beneficial and sustainable:

The affordability is pretty good. I'm on Newstart, so I don't get very much at all, and I've got a nine-year-old. When I moved in, they've allowed me to move in and pay the bond off every week, which has made it a bit better, easier than having to come up with the full amount. Location's good, it's two-bedroom, enough for me and my little boy. (service user)

Tasmania offers a head-leasing program targeted at people affected by family violence as part of its Affordable Housing Strategy.[4] The Rapid Rehousing program was originally designed to provide a statewide pool of up to 50 rental properties that could be used by either victims escaping DFV or perpetrators excluded from the family home under the Safe at Home program. It is provided as a $10,000 subsidy per head-leased property and administered by community housing providers. The funding can be used to assist with rent or to cover security upgrades.

Rapid Rehousing was designed to provide accommodation for a 12-month period, with the intention that once the subsidised period ended, the household would continue to live in the property as a 'normal' tenant paying full rent. The original intention of the program was that it would enable people leaving violence to avoid having to spend extended periods of time in crisis or transitional housing by allowing them to immediately enter what would become long-term and secure housing. It does allow women to be accommodated relatively quickly—in some parts of the state, service providers reported that a tenancy could be secured 'in a week', although others described the program as 'not so rapid', especially for larger families. However, in a more hostile rental market, the amount of time that can be 'bought' with the $10,000 subsidy has been significantly reduced. In the south of the state, the average length of a completed, subsidised period is 28 weeks (in the north and north-west, the equivalent figures

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[4] The program has very recently been expanded to accommodate people with a serious mental illness and people leaving prison.

are 36 and 45 weeks respectively) (Eccleston, Verdouw et al. 2018). This means the program is now effectively functioning as a transitional housing system rather than a long-term one.

> *Rapid Rehousing—they set that up for women to be able to stay in a house with their kids for 12 months, and then the house be signed over to the family 'cause they'd be integrated into that community. Women can only stay in Rapid Rehousing for up to four months and then it's up to—sometimes their lease will be extended. Other times it won't. (worker)*

> *We were in there for just under 12 months and then we had to move out because the owner wanted to move back. We loved the place and we were hoping we could stay, but no, she wanted to move back. (service user)*

As the Rapid Rehousing experience suggests, head-leasing programs can be problematic in tight rental markets. One regional NSW service provider said head-leasing was not an option for their service: 'If you talk to a real estate agent, they'll say, "why head lease?" when they can charge whatever they want'.

Affordability and accessibility

Service providers and service users said that the private rental market was difficult to access, especially for women who were on their own or with children. Low incomes locked them out of certain markets all together, and even in areas where rent is relatively affordable, prices have increased steeply in recent years:

> *Real estate rental, private rental is very, very expensive [here], as it is everywhere. Even if I had been working, which I'm not, I just wouldn't have been able to afford it. My income always goes just over the threshold where you can't get any assistance. (service user)*

Localised economic and development activities also have strong effects on local markets. Service providers described how seasonal demand due to tourism or a spike in demand due to a mining or infrastructure project could absorb available rental stock, including caravan parks. This has implications for the effectiveness of demand-side subsidies like CRA and Start Safely. Workers were aware of the risks involved in a client taking on a tenancy that might became financially unsustainable over time due to rent increases:

> *You never know when that next rent increase is coming, and you're already pushing it to your financial capacity. So one more and then you're just struggling. (worker)*

But cost is not the only barrier for vulnerable families looking for housing in the private rental market. Landlords and their agents typically select tenants from a field of applicants and when competition for available rentals is higher, this field of applicants expands in number. Landlords seek to minimise risk and maximise return and are therefore inclined to choose as tenants those whom they perceive to be most likely to pay rent and sustain a tenancy. People with poor or no rental histories or who are unemployed or only in insecure work are often perceived as presenting a greater risk. Households with children, pets or from particular cultural backgrounds may also face discrimination and stereotyping.

Service users who had spent time in refuges reported lodging dozens of rental applications with real estate agencies without success. Service providers also reported seeing clients 'knocked back' repeatedly. One support worker said women would often ask her 'what's wrong with me?' after receiving multiple rejections. Some women gave up. A number of service users in our small sample only obtained secure housing because they were eventually allocated a social housing tenancy.

I think I put 53 applications in to real estates. Some of the people said, 'tell the truth, tell them where you come from and why you're here' and some people say, 'maybe don't tell them everything'. So some I told and they just looked at me like I had leprosy or something (service user).

The real estate agents we interviewed for this research acknowledged that women escaping DFV were often disadvantaged in the tenant selection process:

If an owner is looking at a client that's referred through the [Start Safely] program, or they're looking at mum and dads with two incomes, a lot of times owners will take the safer, or what they perceive is the safer, option. (stakeholder)

To tackle these perceptions, service providers sought to build relationships with local real estate agents. Some described actively networking with agents, holding breakfasts and forums to try to raise awareness about the needs of their clients and foster links that might lead to better housing outcomes for their clients. There were a small number of examples of these relationships resulting in successful tenancies, and one example of an MOU between a real estate agency and a refuge. While the agent involved stated that 'we're not social workers', she explained that the MOU allowed them to be more flexible:

We still check their application the same as anyone else. The one thing that we do give them though, is a little bit more time, and a little bit more flexibility in what information we require, because we understand that their needs can be very different to a standard person that might walk in off the street. (stakeholder)

Some service users who had secured a private rental property indicated that this had arisen through luck—they had attended an inspection when no one else turned up or talked with a sympathetic property manager who was willing to give them a chance to apply before an open house was called.

Yeah, they give me the key, 'Go have a look'. Because there is some real estate, they are so hard. They do inspection day. They get a lot of people. They pick up the more suitable people for them. This one, they tell me, 'Okay, have a look if you like it'. I went to have a look, I said I like it and they said, okay. (service user)

However, service providers also talked about less favourable encounters with agents, including a distinct lack of interest from property managers, especially in competitive markets. Some workers said that housing assistance programs such as Rent Choice Start Safely or Tenancy Guarantees were not regarded favourably by many real estate agents:

In the private sector, when women present with their tenancy guarantees, the Start Safely or the Rent Start, all those housing products, because of the demand for housing here, they don't complement your application, they actually can have the reverse effect. (worker)

As well as affordability challenges and the competition from other, more presentable applicants, a further, more specific barrier could be a listing on a residential tenancy database. These are databases operated by private companies that collate information on tenants, such as records of past breaches (arrears, damage, abandonment) or tenancy agreements, which can then be used by subscribers to screen out applicants. Databases are regulated by nationally consistent legislation, and in theory this controls what can be listed and provides some assurance as to the accuracy and currency of information contained on the database. However, it does not prevent their use. Historically, these databases functioned as tenant blacklists, and largely, they continue to do so (Hulse, Martin et al. 2018: 54–55, 60). As representatives of property owners, agents protect their interests and will generally avoid letting properties to persons who have

been listed. Service providers reported being very aware of a listing on these databases as a barrier preventing movement into the private rental market:

> *Nine times out of 10 they are on TICA and getting them removed from TICA because of DV-related crimes or damages or whatever—you can't do it. (worker)*

> *We have a lot of clients on TICA and it's not necessarily through their own fault. Partner hasn't paid rent, partner has gambled it, used it on drugs, done a lot of damage, and so the women are then left with the debt and often the perpetrators, they don't seem to be chasing them up. So if they can't locate the perpetrator or he goes to jail, the woman is then left with the whole debt. So that puts her further behind the eight ball. (worker)*

These service providers reported that, if possible, they placed women who were listed on a database in transitional housing, which allowed time to resolve the issue and have her removed from the database, before applying for private rental. However, although processes exist for individuals to apply to have database listings changed or removed, it can be difficult to convincingly establish fault in cases where victim and perpetrator were both listed on the lease. Some service providers argued that where domestic violence was proved to have been present, any debts relating to damage, arrears or abandonment of the property should become null and void.

4.2.3   Social housing

Availability

ABS figures indicate that social housing was 4.2 per cent of total housing stock in 2016, which is the lowest proportion of households in social housing during the last 35 years (AHURI 2017; Groenhart and Burke 2014). Availability does vary across locations, but waiting times in many cases extend into years, and the need to prioritise access for those with very high and complex needs means that under current policy settings a substantial proportion of those who are eligible for social housing will never be allocated a property. In Tasmania, access to social housing was partially facilitated by a policy decision to prioritise people leaving shelters (Section 3.6.1), but in NSW, this did not apply. We asked NSW service providers to estimate the percentage of their clients who successfully obtained a social housing tenancy and replies were as follows: 5–10 per cent (Tweed Heads), zero (Coffs Harbour), 40 per cent (Grafton), 80 per cent (Orange) and 20 per cent (south west Sydney). The variation in these estimates arises from several factors, including stock numbers in the area and turnover.

As is the case in the private rental market, tenancy records could present barriers for victims of DFV. In both NSW and Tasmania having a debt to a social housing provider, such as unpaid rental arrears or property damages, can exclude an applicant from a social housing tenancy until a certain proportion of the debt is repaid. Service providers and service users also stated that dismissive, rude or disrespectful attitudes from housing officers and agencies could dissuade people from completing a social housing application (Section 3.3.1).

Advantages and disadvantages

In areas where social housing supply was concentrated in only a few locations, service providers were understandably reticent to recommend social housing to clients due to the risk that the perpetrator could be living in or have contacts in the same area. Service users too sometimes preferred other housing options because they did not want to be in environments they saw as detrimental to themselves and their children. Others, however, valued the security of tenure and ongoing affordability provided by a social housing tenancy.

I had a nicer house when I rented private. It's just I couldn't afford to keep living like that. Then I fell pregnant with my child so I knew that I needed to have that stable lease. I broke my private lease to take a Department of Housing house. (service user).

I'm really happy. It's security. I feel safe. Now I'm on the other side of the street, I have really good neighbours. I've been with you [community housing provider] for two years in May, and I still walk around going, 'It's mine. It's mine'. Yeah, so I'm really lucky. If there's a problem, it's quickly resolved. There's no dramas. It's way better than a real estate. (service user)

Yet due to decades of residualisation and targeting to need, social housing areas do not always provide supportive environments for women and their children because of anti-social behaviour and other neighbourhood disturbance (Chapter 5). Some service providers reported that social housing may not be an active preference for clients or regarded only as a last resort:

A lot of them don't want to come into social housing. The ones that do are pretty much upfront at the beginning and saying they want to get into social housing. (worker)

4.3   Implications for policy development

Private rental assistance such as subsidy programs and head-leasing have alleviated some pressure on social housing waiting lists and offered women a pathway into the private rental market. However, there is an inherent contradiction in expecting a profit-oriented market to act as part of the housing assistance system. Affordability, competition and scarcity will continue to present barriers for those groups, including women leaving violence, who are perceived as less desirable tenants due to perceptions of risk, despite the provision of subsidies.

In areas where rents are rising faster than CPI, the cost of using subsidies, including CRA, as a primary response to housing need is escalating. Data on CRA already indicates its effectiveness in relieving housing stress is eroding, and NSW's Rent Choice Start Safely is ineffective for some household types, such as single women on Newstart.

Social housing remains an important destination tenure for women leaving DFV. While it does not always offer an ideal living environment for women dealing with trauma or with concerns about safety, it does provide secure tenure and ongoing affordability. Unfortunately, current eligibility requirements and allocation policies ensure that social housing is hyper-rationed to only the most needy. The consequence of this is systemic lack of sustainability and therefore limited opportunities for generating positive revenue streams for new investment (Flanagan, Martin et al. forthcoming). While social housing remains the residualised and stigmatised landlord of last resort, supply will continue to be inadequate to meet both demand and genuine need.

5 Safety and risk

It is well recognised that DFV often leads to homelessness, but this research also found that victims sometimes decide to remain in or return to a violent relationship due either to the lack of available housing, or because the housing available is perceived by women to pose a greater risk than the relationship itself.

The research found that the shortage of affordable housing means women can feel pressured to accept accommodation that is substandard, too far from critical support networks or located in neighbourhoods or settings that feel unsafe or are unsafe. Although service integration is working well in many areas, the actions of the perpetrator after the relationship ends may continue to put women at risk and further constrain their housing choices. If they reject a housing offer due to fear, trauma or a desire to provide appropriate living conditions for their children, this can be perceived by services or defined within policies as declining support or failing to engage.

DFV is a diverse and complex phenomenon and does not always involve physical violence. When responding to DFV, policy makers and service providers need to recognise complexity of the circumstances within which women exercise agency and make decisions, and direct support and assistance accordingly.

5.1 Understanding safety and risk

5.1.1 A lack of housing stops victims leaving violent relationships

Although DFV is one of the biggest drivers of homelessness, a strong theme from the interviews is that victims are making decisions to stay with the perpetrator because no suitable housing can be provided to them. This was described by some SHS and DFV organisations as a growing problem, because while the number of people disclosing violence and seeking help has increased, housing availability has decreased.

> People [are] going back to partners because they can't achieve another housing outcome. And I mean, years ago, that wasn't the case. You could always, especially with DV and if children were involved, you could get people housed. But there's just nothing—the pressure is massive. (worker)

A number of our interview participants talked about victims staying with or returning to perpetrators because alternative housing was not available and said that there are occasions when no accommodation support can be offered. However, a more significant constraint, and one that has been less well recognised, is that the options that can be offered are perceived to be less suitable or safe than living with the perpetrator. That is, services may only be able to offer accommodation that is perceived by their client to be *more* dangerous than current arrangements, and this results in clients feeling that they have no choice but to stay with the perpetrator.

This may seem counterintuitive, because the risks and harms of domestic and family violence are so high, and services treat their clients' safety as paramount so would not place them in danger. But in fact, it indicates the diversity of experiences and circumstances in which families experiencing violence live, and underlines the fact that violence has different manifestations.

Violence associated with a high risk of physical harm is only one of these manifestations, and the harms of living in precarious housing, or housing that is felt to be substandard for children, may outweigh the perceived risks of staying in the relationship.

The complexities and difficulties of leaving a violent relationship are significant. Ongoing harassment by the perpetrator can make daily activities such as paid work incredibly challenging and insecure. Victims leaving relationships often face significant financial costs, which are only partly offset by income support payments, and these payments may be contested or delayed. There are often ongoing emotional bonds between partners and children, and leaving the relationship can result in emotional isolation, loneliness, and distance from other family members and friends. One service user told us that the only reason she did not return to the perpetrator after being unable to find support was that he did not want her to return, while another expressed frustration at the failures of systems to intervene when it was needed:

> I look around and you see posters everywhere that say domestic violence isn't on, you know report, it's everybody's business. That's bullshit, it really—no-one gives a rat's arse, nobody really knows what to do. And I would say that I completely understand now why women go back and it's not just because of the terrible hold that the abusers have over you. (service user)

When the only housing that can be provided is very temporary accommodation such as a hotel room, a situation described by some service providers as typical, this compounds an already unsafe circumstance and can make it impossible for women to move away from the relationship.

> Some women will go back because it takes so long. You know, they're staying in dreadful accommodation because we just don't have anything that's affordable. We're very, very limited apart from our one DV hotel where we can do a couple of nights, it's not sustainable. (worker)

> We had a woman here not that long ago in a motel. She didn't stay, she returned home because she was isolated. All she needed was somebody to be able to listen to her and someone to be able to give her advice. She didn't even get that. (worker)

In some cases, the decision to stay with or return to the perpetrator will result in the victim being 'homeless' as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ABS definition includes lived elements of 'home' including 'a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space':

> When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement: is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; **or does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations** (ABS 2012: 7, emphasis added).

The ABS notes that there are circumstances in which people 'chose to live in situations that might parallel the living situations of people who are homeless', so meeting the above criteria is insufficient—to be homeless, people must be living in one or more of the arrangements described and because they cannot choose to change it. This question of choice is critical to the decisions of women and children remaining in unsafe situations because of a lack of suitable alternatives; as we discuss in the next section, the distinction between 'actual' and 'perceived' risk is more complicated than is often recognised.

The emphasis placed on the issue of women remaining with perpetrators, by a range of service providers and stakeholders across jurisdictions, also suggests that although homelessness is recognised as a consequence of DFV, its prevalence may be masked by the number of people who have given up on seeking help or did not seek it in the first place.

5.1.2 Risk assessments constrain choice and decisions

Interview participants described the experience and management of risk in different ways. The most significant of these was the impact of the lived or felt experience of risk, and the objective and empirical likelihood of harm. These are not mutually exclusive, and women may experience both.

In the first case, the growing importance of trauma-informed principles in service design and delivery has increased awareness of phenomena such as 'hypervigilance' as a response to violence, which results in felt insecurity and danger, even when the risk of harm is objectively unlikely (Guarino 2014). Hypervigilance is a heightened perception of danger and risk and an excessive reaction to external cues, which results in affected people continually scanning their environment for danger and feeling unsafe.

Services may be unable to provide traumatised women with accommodation that supports them in feeling safe, because the limited number and type of housing available means that they cannot provide accommodation in a location or form that addresses the needs arising from the response to and impact of trauma. For example, providers described how the reputation or ambience of a neighbourhood can lead to women feel unsafe.

> I have to say that if women have come from traumatised situations, they're on high alert, you know, they've got the hypervigilance going on, and so therefore a lot of places where they've heard are not safe places, they've got an absolute barrier to going there and I can understand it. (worker)

> For some of these single mums with small children moving into some of these housing areas, it's actually quite a frightening experience, because there are night noises, there's family violence going on down the street that carries which triggers their own trauma, which triggers the children's trauma. (worker)

In the second case, women may objectively be at risk of harm from the perpetrator. In these circumstances, it is again the limited accommodation choices that can be offered by services that results in women feeling unsafe, not because of the trauma responses of the victim, but because of the risks posed by the actions of the perpetrator. For example, a service provider described a client who could be offered only one available property, which she judged to be too visible and therefore unsafe:

> She looked at it and said that it was just too exposed because it was on a junction of two roads and she felt that she would easily be seen if she was walking somewhere. (worker)

> I've had cases where a client has been staying there [hotel] and the perpetrator has just done a drive-by to each motel and found her. So, I wouldn't ever rely on hotels as an option. (worker)

Importantly, the distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' risk should not be interpreted to mean that the former is real while the latter is only apparent. The impact of both is consequential and taken very seriously by service providers, and has significant implications for women's choices, outcomes, and housing pathways. Both are critically important to the decisions that women make around violent relationships and moving to a new house. Service providers indicated that both could also potentially have severe consequences, if a victim's decision is classified as declining support and as a result they are moved down waiting or priority lists. This reportedly happened, for example, to the client described above who refused accommodation because of its exposed location:

So she refused that one and so now we're waiting for a second property. I can't just think when she went on our list, but she's been right up there and it's definitely over a year now. (worker)

5.2 What puts women at risk?

5.2.1 Perpetrators' actions and accountability

The constraints on staying in an area or moving stem from the needs of adults and children, and available services, but there are further constraints in some cases where abuse in ongoing.

Service providers talked about the value of rental subsidies and safety upgrades, such as those available under 'safe at home' type programs, but also indicated that the viability of these are dependent on perpetrators being held accountable. In circumstances where harassment by the perpetrator persists, these are no longer effective in keeping women and children safe.

They put stronger locks on, they can put locks on windows you know all this type of thing and that does take place, so a lot of our properties are all ready to go so to speak but we still can't stop someone from parking a car outside their house, I mean it's a public road. But then it's up to the client to make any complaints as necessary. (worker)

I've had a client who secured a property, received Start Safely, things were vastly improved for her until the neighbours knew the perpetrator and revealed her whereabouts. (worker)

5.2.2 Lack of housing supply

Service providers reported that because they are often unable to offer clients who are at risk of harm any real choice of housing, an emergency option may be a hotel room. There are many circumstances in which clients may decide that this is not feasible: for example, when women have multiple children or older children, or when the available hotel room or caravan park is not clean or felt to be unsafe.

Interview participants recognised the constraints on a service system in which housing options are often severely restricted. Long-term, high quality accommodation in a preferred location is only very rarely immediately available, and service providers stressed the importance of providing realistic information and support to their clients. However, they also described situations in which victims are faced with no real choice, and no safe option. Where the lack of choice is interpreted by police as a victim choosing danger, it can lead police to respond differently to the needs of those victims, which then places them at further risk.

[If women do not leave violent homes because of a lack of options] then the police are like 'well she's not helping us keep her safe, she's putting herself at risk'. And really it's about a system not working and blaming the victim for not behaving in a certain way or making the choices that can create a situation where they might get a poor response from police out of their own frustration and then she's reluctant to call them. (worker)

People leaving violent relationships often also leave behind furniture and other essentials. The quality of available goods and services is important, especially for women with children.

Having a clean mattress is one of the most important things because they've probably come from having really nice stuff and if you're forced to put your child on a soiled mattress because that's all there is then you start thinking, this is what I've forced my children into, maybe it wasn't so bad at home. A stained mattress is a huge barrier to a woman staying away. (worker)

5.3 Safety, risk and choice

Service providers and stakeholders reported that the experiences of both violence and leaving violence are diverse, and this is reflected in the interviews with service users. Our sample was small, and even within this small group a range of experiences and views were described. Some reported high levels of physical risk and ongoing fear of contact with the perpetrator after the violence had ended:

> *Victims Services got cameras for me. So that's one good thing is that if he does do something he won't get away with it. But yes, it's just the fear of not knowing—is he driving past and that kind of thing. Is he going to just turn up? Yes, those kinds of feelings. (service user)*

> *I can go to bed at night and not worry that someone's going to come in and get us, which that's how I lived for so many years, just so worried. It's hard to stop that. (service user)*

However, others said they had not realised that their experience was of violence until after it had ended, and service providers also described processes of demonstrating to women that they had experienced violence when they did not recognise it:

> *They don't think that they're in a domestic violence situation because they haven't been hit. You don't have access to any income, you don't have any choices and you've never been encouraged to learn to drive or anything like that, but he's never hit me so no, it's not a domestic violence situation. (worker)*

Just as the experiences of violence and leaving it are heterogeneous, so are the needs of women with regard to staying close to their original home or moving away. Service providers and service users reported that some victims want to move elsewhere because of safety concerns, but others may want to stay in the area because of the presence of social and support networks, children's schools and services, and a sense of home and community. Equally, victims may not experience ongoing safety concerns or live in fear, and some of the service users we interviewed were in this category:

> *Participant: No. Sometimes he sees me in the, we meet in the—I go shopping with my friend. When he sees me, he just, you know, not say hello or anything.*

> *Interviewer: Okay, but it's not a police thing. It's not dangerous.*

> *Participant: No, no.*

This diversity in our sample is indicative of the differences in experiences of risk and fear that victims have during and after relationships. These are indicative, in turn, of the diversity of responses services need to be able to provide to ensure they can meet clients' needs. Yet in a system in which there is a systemic lack of housing options, assumptions that any housing is better than the circumstances that a woman has left may be at best unreasonable and at worst, harmful. One worker talked about how victims could be placed under pressure to accept any housing outcome, even if it felt inappropriate. Another worker described this situation as a form of 'systems abuse':

> *It's so compounding to experience time and time again that constant powerlessness. So where there isn't any choice, it's look, you take this house. You take this house because that's the only option that you've got and so they've got nothing. And it's like, oh here I am again, pushed into a corner with no options and you're talking about a woman who's protecting herself and her children and you're not giving her any options to protect herself and her children, that's where she's just come from.*

5.4   Implications for policy development

Much of the rhetoric of the 'scourge' of domestic violence has focussed on situations where violence is physically harmful, and the risk of serious injury or death is high and ongoing (valentine and Breckenridge 2016). These situations undeniably exist and policy and practice need to ensure that women and children who are affected are safe and that perpetrators are held accountable. But other forms of violence exist which cause other types of harm, and these harms are also serious, but may not be as visible and therefore may not be given the same level of attention or perceived in the same way.

Women trying to leave a violent relationship exercise agency and make decisions based on their own circumstances and needs. In many cases, these needs are governed by the desire to ensure the best possible outcome for their children. For women who have experienced coercive, controlling relationships but not physical violence, living with their children in a room in a pub or caravan park or a substandard private rental property may be considered more harmful, especially for children, than does remaining in or returning to the relationship. This indicates that the consequences of poor integration between governmental responses to DFV and the wider housing system extend beyond homelessness and include the victims of DFV continuing to live in violent relationships because they perceive there to be no reasonable or genuine alternative.

6   Policy development options

This research found that largely, the immediate response to DFV is effective and timely, although constrained by resources and growing demand. The principal challenge facing services and their clients is the lack of pathways through which women can move on from crisis and transitional responses into secure, long-term housing.

Government investment in social housing is inadequate and access is therefore restricted to those with the greatest and most complex needs. Over time, expenditure on direct or supply-side housing subsidies has declined and expenditure on indirect or demand-side subsidies has increased. But reliance on demand-side responses in very tight and costly rental markets is problematic, and for women and children leaving DFV, housing options are limited, and safety and security is not assured.

Women and children leaving violence are in diverse circumstances and have a range of needs. Refuges, shelters and transitional accommodation are vital immediate responses and provide valuable support for many families, but the lack of secure, affordable and permanent housing is a systemic issue. To meet the needs of vulnerable families, greater investment is needed in a range of affordable housing options, especially social and affordable housing that is planned and designed to be safe, secure and supportive as well as affordable in the long term.

6.1   The problem: DFV and housing outcomes

This research explores how best to ensure safe, affordable housing options for women who are leaving DFV. Although it was originally conceptualised around the concept of housing pathways, one of its key findings is that real pathways are rarely available to women who seek assistance from services. The current system appears to offer women who need to leave their home protection from DFV in the short term, and a wide range of therapeutic and practical support. But due to the difficulty of securing housing into the longer term, stays in refuges and transitional accommodation are becoming longer, and exits are increasingly scarce. Despite the success of rental subsidy programs, there are many constraints on entry to the private rental market, and it is not feasible for many people on very low incomes. The absolutely scarcity of social housing also blocks this pathway for many, even those unable to find long-term stability in any other tenure. Home ownership is unrealistic for many people leaving DFV, although for some it may be a legitimate and feasible future aspiration.

In the absence of government commitment to substantially increasing the size and scope of the social housing system—that is, to enlarging it to the point where it can accommodate more than just those in greatest need—agencies have turned to other options. Housing allowance schemes such as CRA and Rent Choice Start Safely and head-leasing programs like Rapid Rehousing are designed to support people who historically would have sought social housing to find accommodation in the private housing market instead. But the effectiveness of these initiatives in defraying housing costs is decreasing as rents increase and incomes, including government payments, remain relatively static. It is notable that the Rent Choice Start Safely guidelines deem 'affordability' to extend to paying rent equivalent to up to 50 per cent of income,

when this is elsewhere defined as a form of 'housing crisis' (Yates and Gabriel 2006). The costs of demand-led responses to affordability pressures can rapidly escalate, especially in contexts where 'bricks and mortar' subsidies have decreased or in times of economic downturn and rising unemployment (Kemp 2000). It is likely that pressure on the private rental market will only increase, and affordability is worsening for lower-income households, which include single parents in disproportionate numbers. It is therefore anticipated that a continuing emphasis on demand-side rather than supply-side subsidies will result in such escalation in expenditure over time (Hulse 2002; AIHW 2018).

For women and children seeking to leave DFV, the options are limited, and safety and security are not assured. The data available on SHS clients affected by DFV suggests that for many, especially those who are in very poor housing circumstances when they seek support, SHS assistance is not able to help them to transition into long-term, stable housing. The lack of exit points from homelessness services, though perennial (Tually, Faulkner et al. 2008), is critical and will continue to lead to vulnerable families feeling and being unsafe, unless the gap between the increasingly integrated and holistic DFV service and support system and the wider housing market is bridged.

6.2   Policy implications

To be effective, housing support should reflect the diversity of people's needs and experiences. **Refuges and shelters**, other types of **emergency accommodation**, and **transitional housing** remain vital responses, especially for people in crisis. Workers in refuges are highly valued by service users and other service providers, because they provide access to other services and support at a very difficult time for women and their children. In addition, staying in refuges and shelters involves routine contact and company with workers and other people who have experienced violence: while this is not helpful for some people, for others it can be valuable in minimising the stress and risks of loneliness and isolation for women whose social networks have been drastically changed by the end of their relationship.

Yet to effectively move on from crisis and transitional housing, **affordable long-term housing** is a critical need. This is also vital for families who do not want or need refuge or transitional accommodation. Our research revealed substantial differences between areas in the housing-related support that services can offer, and therefore the housing experiences of women and children. In areas with tight housing markets, like northern NSW and southern Tasmania, supply is limited and rents are increasing. Service providers in northern NSW reported actively encouraging their clients to look for private rentals outside the area. Affordability is a serious barrier to the feasibility of rental subsidies being an adequate response in high cost housing markets, including inner and middle ring Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne and some regional areas, while even the shorter-term options available to service providers in markets like Hobart are vulnerable to the impact of seasonal demands and other shocks. In contrast, the Rent Choice Start Safely subsidy and the Rapid Rehousing program were able to work effectively in assisting women out of refuges in south-western and outer western Sydney and some Tasmanian markets.

Overall, government initiatives that seek to 'socialise' (Parkinson and Parsell 2018) the costs of the private rental market to make it affordable can provide some pathways to affordability and stability, but their cost to government is likely to increase and their effectiveness decline over time. There is research emerging which demonstrates that investment in new social and affordable housing supply, planned in response to patterns of population growth, is a more sustainable and efficient option to widespread housing need than demand-side subsidies, and produces a range of other social and economic gains (Flanagan, Martin et al. 2019).

Domestic and family **violence has diverse manifestations and effects** and is experienced by families in all socioeconomic circumstances. Families who live in poverty or have other intersecting support needs, such as those relating to disability or trauma, may need support in very low-cost or deeply subsidised housing for longer periods than are currently available in most areas. **Safety and risk** are ongoing concerns for some women and children after the relationship has ended and may require more timely and proactive responses relating to perpetrator accountability, security and location of housing, trauma responses, and children's needs. For women and children for whom ongoing safety is not a concern, other responses are likely to be needed, for example support in setting up new households, training, social support, or employment. Flexible responses are needed to meet the diversity of needs.

6.3   Final remarks

Private rental market subsidies have become the housing assistance policy of preference for Australian governments, and more than this, are seen to offer recipients a degree of choice unavailable in the social housing system (Jacobs, Hulse et al. 2016). Maximising the capacity of the private market to cater for lower income earners through subsidies, landlord incentives and guarantees was central to Tasmania's Affordable Housing Strategy 2015–2025 when it was originally released, and Rent Choice Start Safely has become a primary response from service providers to the housing needs of women leaving violence in New South Wales.

Yet our findings suggest that the assumption that the private rental market will act as part of the social welfare system is overly optimistic. Both women and service providers consistently report that private landlords perceive women with children—who often have undocumented or unstable tenancy histories, low incomes and a need for service support—to pose a risk to either rental returns or the condition of the property. The tighter the market, the greater the capacity of landlords to choose their tenants from other applicants perceived to offer less risk and with greater financial capacity.

In large and diverse rental markets initiatives like Start Safely and Rapid Rehousing work reasonably well, and recipients even have some capacity to choose housing type and location. But more commonly, in small or tight housing markets, the only 'choice' available to women is relatively expensive, inappropriate or poor quality housing that can become unaffordable when the subsidy ends.

The consequences include extended stays in refuges, brokered and transitional accommodation, homelessness and, in some cases, a decision to return to the perpetrator. For women with children, who need to demonstrate access to secure and safe housing to avoid statutory child protection intervention, this may also lead to losing custody of their children. We argue that, not only are these consequences indicative of a system failing to meet people's needs, but also of a society that is failing, and even further abusing, some of its most vulnerable citizens.

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Appendix 1: Housing situations before and after support: housing, occupancy, tenure and dwelling type

Table A1: Last reported housing by first reported housing, proportion of clients

| Housing, first reported | No. of clients | Housing, last reported (% of clients) | | | | | | | | | Total |
		No shelter or improvised/ inadequate dwelling	Short term temporary accomm.	House, townhouse or flat: couch surfer or with no tenure	Public or comm. housing: renter or rent free	Private or other housing: renter, rent free or owner	Institutional settings	Other: homeless	Other: at risk	Not stated	
No shelter or improvised/ inadequate dwelling	1,728	28.1	15.9	7.9	12.2	19.4	1.0	1.2	4.1	10.2	100
Short term temporary accommodation	6,106	2.0	36.0	5.0	18.0	25.3	1.0	0.7	4.1	8.0	100
House, townhouse or flat: couch surfer or with no tenure	4,779	1.7	8.8	38.3	13.0	24.5	0.7	0.8	3.1	9.1	100

Housing, first reported	No. of clients	Housing, last reported (% of clients)									Total
		No shelter or improvised/ inadequate dwelling	Short term temporary accomm.	House, townhouse or flat: couch surfer or with no tenure	Public or comm. housing: renter or rent free	Private or other housing: renter, rent free or owner	Institutional settings	Other: homeless	Other: at risk	Not stated	
Public or community housing: renter or rent free	5,684	0.5	5.2	2.6	76.2	7.0	0.6	0.2	2.9	4.9	100
Private or other housing: renter, rent free or owner	15,715	0.7	4.4	2.8	5.3	77.4	0.2	0.4	3.0	5.7	100
Institutional settings	528	3.8	13.3	7.0	12.5	18.2	28.2	1.3	4.9	10.8	100
Other: homeless	372	3.5	12.9	6.7	10.0	22.0	1.6	24.2	5.7	13.4	100
Other: at risk	5,163	0.6	3.6	2.0	4.9	15.7	0.4	0.3	64.3	8.3	100
Not stated	12,451	0.4	1.2	0.9	1.7	6.5	0.2	0.2	3.5	85.4	100

Notes: Data is for 2016–17, for female clients aged 18 and over for whom domestic violence was a reason for seeking assistance and for whom the support period had closed.

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Cubes

Table A2: SHS data: Last reported occupancy by first reported occupancy, proportion of clients

Occupancy, first reported	Occupancy, last reported (% of clients)									
	No. of clients	Not applicable	Leased tenure: nominated on lease	Lease in place: not nominated on lease	Couch surfer	Boarder	Living with relative fee free	Other	Invalid or missing	Total
Not applicable	5,466	48.5	18.9	2.9	3.1	3.8	3.8	5.7	13.3	100
Leased tenure: nominated on lease	12,132	2.4	79.6	2.1	1.4	1.6	2.3	2.5	8.1	100
Lease in place: not nominated on lease	2,746	3.8	23.0	46.3	2.8	4.2	5.9	4.7	9.3	100
Couch surfer	3,289	4.3	31.2	4.4	32.2	5.6	5.2	4.9	12.3	100
Boarder	2,554	4.9	27.8	5.1	3.4	36.3	7.2	4.7	10.6	100
Living with relative fee free	3,224	3.4	20.0	3.4	3.3	4.4	51.9	3.8	10.0	100
Other	4,688	5.5	24.8	3.5	2.9	4.0	4.8	42.4	12.0	100
Invalid or missing	18,432	3.0	7.6	1.0	0.7	1.0	1.4	1.8	83.5	100

Notes: Data is for 2016–17, for female clients aged 18 and over for whom domestic violence was a reason for seeking assistance and for whom the support period had closed.

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Cubes

Table A3: SHS data: Last reported tenure by first reported tenure, proportion of clients

Tenure, first reported	No. of clients	Renter: private housing	Renter: public housing	Renter: community housing	Renter: transitional housing	Renter: caravan park	Renter: boarding/rooming house	Renter: emergency accomm./shelter/refuge	Other renter	Rent free: private housing	Rent free: public housing	Rent free: community housing	Rent free: transitional housing	Rent free: caravan park	Rent free: boarding/rooming house	Rent free: emergency accomm./shelter/refuge	Other rent free	Life tenure scheme	Owner: shared equity or rent/buy	Owner: mortgage	Owner: fully owned	Other tenure type	No tenure	Invalid or missing	Total
Renter: private housing	10,472	72.0	4.4	1.7	0.7	0.2	0.8	1.5	1.0	2.2	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.6	1.5	.	0.1	0.8	0.1	0.1	3.3	8.7	100
Renter: public housing	3,822	5.4	72.1	2.7	0.6	0.1	0.9	2.0	0.6	0.9	1.7	0.3	.	.	0.3	0.6	1.1	.	.	0.1	0.1	0.1	2.7	7.7	100
Renter: community housing	1,220	5.3	10.7	61.6	1.07	.	1.1	1.9	1.0	0.9	1.2	2.1	.	.	0.4	0.7	0.8	.	.	.	.	0.3	2.9	8.2	100
Renter: transitional housing	394	14.7	30.0	5.6	29.4	0.3	0.8	1.3	1.0	1.5	1.3	0.8	0.3	.	.	0.5	0.8	.	.	0.8	.	.	4.3	7.1	100
Renter: caravan park	181	17.3	9.4	5.0	2.8	35.4	5.0	4.4	1.1	2.2	.	.	.	0.6	.	0.6	1.7	.	0.6	2.2	.	.	7.2	5.0	100
Renter: boarding/rooming house	736	16.4	9.2	3.3	1.8	0.8	32.9	4.4	1.8	2.5	1.8	0.4	0.1	.	1.4	1.8	2.2	.	.	0.3	0.4	.	8.0	10.7	100

Tenure, first reported	No. of clients	Renter: private housing	Renter: public housing	Renter: community housing	Renter: transitional housing	Renter: caravan park	Renter: boarding/rooming house	Renter: emergency accomm./ shelter/refuge	Other renter	Rent free: private housing	Rent free: public housing	Rent free: community housing	Rent free: transitional housing	Rent free: caravan park	Rent free: boarding/ rooming house	Rent free: emergency accomm./shelter/refuge	Other rent free	Life tenure scheme	Owner: shared equity or rent/buy	Owner: mortgage	Owner: fully owned	Other tenure type	No tenure	Invalid or missing	Total
Tenure, last reported (% of clients)																									
Renter: emergency accomm. shelter/refuge	1,671	22.0	17.1	3.6	3.8	0.4	2.0	20.0	1.9	2.9	1.2	0.4	0.2	.	0.2	1.6	4.3	0.1	0.1	1.0	0.4	0.1	6.8	9.7	*100*
Other renter	747	21.2	7.6	3.0	1.2	0.5	3.1	2.3	32.8	4.0	0.3	0.1	.	.	0.7	1.1	3.6	.	.	0.7	.	0.1	7.8	10.0	*100*
Rent free: private housing	1,887	21.0	5.4	2.3	2.0	0.4	1.6	2.8	0.9	41.1	1.0	0.1	0.1	.	0.2	1.0	2.9	.	0.3	0.8	0.2	0.2	6.4	9.4	*100*
Rent free: public housing	777	6.4	13.5	2.3	0.9	0.1	1.3	2.3	0.4	1.7	52.4	1.3	.	.	0.4	0.6	2.1	.	.	0.1	0.1	0.1	6.1	7.9	*100*
Rent free: community housing	219	1.8	5.5	12.8	1.8	.	1.8	4.6	0.9	0.5	4.1	54.8	.	.	.	.	4.1	.	.	.	.	.	2.7	4.6	*100*
Rent free: transitional housing	34	17.7	14.7	.	14.7	.	2.9	5.9	.	2.9	2.9	.	17.7	.	5.9	.	2.9	.	.	.	.	.	2.9	8.8	*100*

Tenure, first reported	No. of clients	Renter: private housing	Renter: public housing	Renter: community housing	Renter: transitional housing	Renter: caravan park	Renter: boarding/rooming house	Renter: emergency accomm./shelter/refuge	Other renter	Rent free: private housing	Rent free: public housing	Rent free: community housing	Rent free: transitional housing	Rent free: caravan park	Rent free: boarding/rooming house	Rent free: emergency accomm./shelter/refuge	Other rent free	Life tenure scheme	Owner: shared equity or rent/buy	Owner: mortgage	Owner: fully owned	Other tenure type	No tenure	Invalid or missing	Total
Rent free: caravan park	21	4.8	4.8	4.8	.	9.5	.	.	9.5	4.8	.	.	.	14.3	4.8	.	4.8	.	.	.	.	.	14.3	23.8	*100*
Rent free: boarding/rooming house	201	14.9	10.5	4.5	1.5	0.5	4.0	3.0	2.0	2.5	3.0	.	.	.	36.8	2.0	2.0	.	.	.	.	.	6.5	6.5	*100*
Rent free: emergency accomm./shelter/refuge	1,757	18.7	9.8	3.0	1.7	0.4	1.9	4.8	1.5	2.9	1.0	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.4	24.7	4.4	.	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.5	6.7	16.8	*100*
Other rent free	1,532	18.1	8.0	2.3	1.0	0.6	1.6	2.0	2.0	3.7	0.9	0.1	0.1	.	0.6	1.2	40.4	.	0.2	1.0	0.2	0.3	5.6	10.1	*100*
Life tenure scheme	1	.	.	100	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	*100*
Owner: shared	130	12.3	1.5	.	1.5	.	.	3.1	.	1.5	.	.	.	.	.	0.8	0.8	.	63.9	3.9	1.5	.	0.8	8.5	*100*

Tenure, first reported	No. of clients	Renter: private housing	Renter: public housing	Renter: community housing	Renter: transitional housing	Renter: caravan park	Renter: boarding/rooming house	Renter: emergency accomm./shelter/refuge	Other renter	Rent free: private housing	Rent free: public housing	Rent free: community housing	Rent free: transitional housing	Rent free: caravan park	Rent free: boarding/rooming house	Rent free: emergency accomm./shelter/refuge	Other rent free	Life tenure scheme	Owner: shared equity or rent/buy	Owner: mortgage	Owner: fully owned	Other tenure type	No tenure	Invalid or missing	Total
equity or rent/ buy																									
Owner: mortgage	2,381	9.7	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.3	1.1	.	.	.	.	0.2	0.2	1.0	.	0.6	75.0	1.7	0.1	1.0	7.4	*100*
Owner: fully owned	559	7.3	0.9	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.7	.	.	.	.	.	0.5	1.1	.	0.2	8.4	70.1	0.2	1.8	7.0	*100*
Other tenure type	145	22.1	6.2	3.5	0.7	.	1.4	.	0.7	2.1	.	.	.	.	.	.	3.5	.	.	0.7	.	39.3	9.0	11.0	*100*
No tenure	6,036	16.8	8.4	3.3	1.2	0.6	2.1	3.6	1.9	3.2	0.9	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.5	1.2	2.8	.	0.1	0.7	0.2	0.4	38.4	13.5	*100*
Invalid or missing	17,584	6.1	1.9	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.3	0.0	0.0	.	0.1	0.2	0.6	.	0.1	1.5	0.4	0.1	2.0	84.1	*100*

Table A4: SHS data: Last reported dwelling type by first reported dwelling type, proportion of clients

Dwelling type, first reported	No. of clients	Dwelling type, last reported (% of clients)																					Total
		House/townhouse/flat	Caravan	Tent	Cabin	Improvised dwelling	No dwelling/street/park/in the open	Motor vehicle	Boarding/rooming house	Emergency accomm.	Hotel/motel/b&b	Hospital (excl. psychiatric)	Psychiatric hospital/unit	Disability support	Rehabilitation	Adult correctional facility	Youth/juvenile correctional centre	Boarding school/residential college	Aged care facility	Immigration detention centre	Other	Invalid or missing	
House/town-house/flat	32,376	87.9	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.6	2.3	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	.	0.0	0.0	.	0.4	7.0	100
Caravan	320	45.9	37.2	.	0.3	.	.	0.3	1.3	5.0	2.5	.	0.3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.6	6. 6	100
Tent	81	43.2	2.5	29.6	1.2	1.2	3.7	.	4.9	3.7	2.5	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1.2	6.2	100
Cabin	44	61.4	4.6	.	20.5	.	.	.	.	.	4.6	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	9.1	100
Boat	1	100	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	100
Improvised dwelling	153	46.4	1.3	.	.	20.3	4.6	0.7	0.7	15.0	2.6	0.7	0.7	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	0.7	6.5	100
No dwelling/ street/park/in the open	680	41.2	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.9	22.7	1.0	3.7	8.7	3.7	0.4	.	.	0.3	0.6	.	.	0.2	.	2.1	14.0	100
Motor vehicle	418	49.8	1.2	0.5	0.2	.	0.7	20.6	3.6	5.3	2.2	.	0.5	.	0.2	0.5	.	.	.	.	1.2	13.6	100

Dwelling type, first reported	No. of clients	Dwelling type, last reported (% of clients)																					Total
		House/townhouse/flat	Caravan	Tent	Cabin	Improvised dwelling	No dwelling/street/park/in the open	Motor vehicle	Boarding/rooming house	Emergency accomm.	Hotel/motel/b&b	Hospital (excl. psychiatric)	Psychiatric hospital/unit	Disability support	Rehabilitation	Adult correctional facility	Youth/juvenile correctional centre	Boarding school/residential college	Aged care facility	Immigration detention centre	Other	Invalid or missing	
Boarding/ rooming house	323	45.2	0.6	0.3	0.3	.	2.8	0.3	30.7	5.0	2.2	.	.	.	0.3	0.3	.	0.3	.	.	1.0	10.8	100
Emergency accomm.	3,269	58.0	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.8	0.2	1.2	27.2	1.6	0.1	0.1	.	0.2	0.3	.	.	0.1	0.0	0.7	8.8	100
Hotel/motel/ B&B	1,099	52.6	1.0	0.1	.	0.1	0.4	0.6	2.0	8.0	23.2	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.1	.	0.1	.	1.1	9.7	100
Hospital (excl. psychiatric)	165	52.7	1.2	.	.	0.6	1.2	.	0.6	9.1	1.8	14.6	3.0	.	1.2	0.6	.	.	1.2	.	1.2	10.9	100
Psychiatric hospital/unit	122	41.0	1.6	0.8	.	.	2.5	0.8	1.6	6.6	1.6	0.8	23.8	1.6	.	.	.	.	.	.	4.9	12.3	100
Disability support	12	33.3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	8.3	.	.	.	41.7	.	.	.	.	8.3	.	.	8.3	100
Rehabilitation	88	45.5	.	.	.	.	.	.	2.3	5.7	2.3	.	2.3	.	27.3	2.3	.	.	.	.	.	12.5	100

Dwelling type, first reported	No. of clients	Dwelling type, last reported (% of clients)																				
		House/townhouse/flat	Caravan	Tent	Cabin	Improvised dwelling	No dwelling/street/park/in the open	Motor vehicle	Boarding/rooming house	Emergency accomm.	Hotel/motel/b&b	Hospital (excl. psychiatric)	Psychiatric hospital/unit	Disability support	Rehabilitation	Adult correctional facility	Youth/juvenile correctional centre	Boarding school/residential college	Aged care facility	Immigration detention centre	Other	Invalid or missing	Total
Adult correctional facility	119	41.2	1.7	.	.	0.8	2.5	.	1.7	2.5	0.8	.	.	.	3.4	27.7	.	.	.	.	3.4	14.3	100
Youth/juvenile correctional centre	5	40.0	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	20.0	.	.	.	.	40.0	100
Boarding school/residential college	7	14.3	14.3	.	.	.	.	14.3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	42.9	.	.	.	14.3	100
Aged care facility	8	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	100	.	.	.	100
Immigration detention centre	1	100.0	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	100
Other	468	47.2	0.6	0.2	.	0.6	1.1	.	2.8	5.6	1.9	0.2	0.4	.	0.6	0.4	.	.	.	.	26.3	12.0	100

Dwelling type, first reported	No. of clients	Dwelling type, last reported (% of clients)																					Total
		House/townhouse/flat	Caravan	Tent	Cabin	Improvised dwelling	No dwelling/street/park/in the open	Motor vehicle	Boarding/rooming house	Emergency accomm.	Hotel/motel/b&b	Hospital (excl. psychiatric)	Psychiatric hospital/unit	Disability support	Rehabilitation	Adult correctional facility	Youth/juvenile correctional centre	Boarding school/residential college	Aged care facility	Immigration detention centre	Other	Invalid or missing	
Invalid or missing	12,761	13.3	0.1	0.0	.	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	.	.	0.0	.	0.3	84.9	100

Appendix 2: Detailed description of methods used to analyse AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services data

The analysis reported in Chapter 2 of this report used AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Cubes. Using figures for all states and territories, the data was filtered to show only female clients, aged 18 or over, with closed support periods, who have reported domestic and family violence as a reason for needing assistance.

A single, multi-level cross-tabulation was produced combining the four measures of clients' housing situation, reported separately and in full in Appendix 1. The columns and rows in this cross-tabulation were then collapsed into one of five categories based on the assumptions listed here; the categories were institution, not housed, poorly housed, well housed, status uncertain. The use of all four measures at once was designed to capture greater detail to inform the classification—for example, two clients may be reported as living in public housing (Housing), but the client who is named on the lease (Occupancy) can be assumed to have a greater degree of security in that housing than a client who is staying with a relative rent-free. Short-term accommodation (Housing) in a house, townhouse or flat (Occupancy) may offer a different living environment than the same type of accommodation in a caravan park or a rooming house.

The methods and their underlying assumptions were as follows.

1   The original categories were reinterpreted or recoded into more generic but useable categories.

Table A5: Methods: Categories used to recode SHS data for analysis

As described in original data	As recoded
Housing	
No shelter or improvised/inadequate dwelling	Primary homelessness
Short term temporary accommodation	Secondary homelessness
House, townhouse or flat: couch surfer or with no tenure	Secondary homelessness
Other: homeless	Secondary homelessness
Public or community housing: renter or rent free	Social housing
Private or other housing: renter, rent free or owner	Private housing
Institutional settings	Institution
Other: at risk	Other, at risk
Not stated	Unknown
Occupancy	
Invalid or missing	Unknown
Not applicable	Not applicable
Leased tenure—nominated on lease	On lease
Lease in place—not nominated on lease	Not on lease
Boarder	Boarding
Living with relative, fee free	Secondary homelessness

As described in original data	As recoded
Other	Other
Couch surfer	Secondary homelessness
Tenure	
Invalid or missing	Unknown
No tenure	Short-term
Other rent free	Other
Other renter	Other
Other tenure type not elsewhere specified	Other
Owner—being purchased/with mortgage	Owner
Owner—shared equity or rent/buy scheme	Owner
Owner—fully owned	Owner
Rent free—boarding/rooming house	Boarding house/caravan/cabin
Rent free—caravan park	Boarding house/caravan/cabin
Rent free—community housing	Short-term
Rent free—emergency accommodation/night shelter/women's refuge/youth shelter where rent is not charged	Crisis accommodation
Rent free—private housing	Short-term
Rent free—public housing	Short-term
Rent free—transitional housing	Short-term
Renter—boarding/rooming house	Boarding house/caravan/cabin
Renter—caravan park	Boarding house/caravan/cabin
Renter—community housing	Renter
Renter—emergency accommodation/night shelter/women's refuge/youth shelter where rent is charged	Crisis accommodation
Renter—private housing	Renter
Renter—public housing	Renter
Renter—transitional housing	Short-term
Life tenure scheme	Other
Dwelling type	
Caravan	Boarding house/caravan cabin
Tent	Primary homelessness
Improvised building/dwelling	Primary homelessness
No dwelling/street/park/in the open	Primary homelessness
Motor vehicle	Primary homelessness

As described in original data	As recoded
House/townhouse/flat	Proper dwelling
Cabin	Boarding house/caravan cabin
Emergency accommodation	Crisis accommodation
Other	Other
Boarding/rooming house	Boarding house/caravan cabin
Hotel/motel/bed and breakfast	Hotel
Invalid or missing	Unknown
Hospital (excluding psychiatric)	Institution—care
Psychiatric hospital/unit	Institution—care
Disability support	Institution—care
Rehabilitation	Institution—rehabilitative
Adult correctional factility	Institution—corrective
Youth/juvenile justice correctional centre	Institution—corrective
Boarding school/residential college	Institution—school
Aged care facility	Institution—care
Immigration detention centre	Institution—corrective

Source: Authors.

2 The initial recoding of institutional settings sought to recognise that care settings offered a very different living environment to corrective settings, for example. However, the focus of the qualitative data collection, which this additional data analysis was intended to contextualise, was such that the experiences of the smaller number of women exiting (or entering) institutional settings were not prominent. We therefore decided to code all these categories as one single category—'institution'.

3 Each recoded housing situation was then assessed against three questions about the kind of housing situation it could be reasonably assumed to offer:

— Would it provide adequate shelter (e.g. a roof and four walls, a lockable door)?

— Would it offer appropriate surroundings (e.g. a reasonable degree of independence and control, a calm, supportive atmosphere that is free from a sense of crisis)?

— Would it offer security (i.e. of tenure, actual or implicit)?

Answers to these questions for certain of the recoded categories were relatively straightforward—a reasonable assessment of 'primary homelessness', for example (which is essentially 'rooflessness'), would conclude it offers none of these things. However, 'social housing' is harder to assess, because the adequacy of what is offered depends on other circumstances (is the person sleeping on the couch or in their own room, are they named on a lease or staying with a relative, etc?).

Obviously there are aspects of housing that are equally important to those above, such as quality, cost, location or size. However, these characteristics cannot be inferred from the data available.

The decisions made at this point in the process are shown below.

Table A6: Methods: Assessment of adequacy, appropriateness and security of selected housing situations

Housing situation	Adequacy	Appropriateness	Security
Housing			
Primary homelessness	No	No	No
Secondary homelessness		No	No
Social housing			
Private housing			
Institution	Institution	Institution	Institution
Other, at risk		No	No
Unknown			
Occupancy			
Unknown			
Not applicable			
On lease			
Not on lease			
Boarding			
Secondary homelessness		No	No
Other			
Tenure			
Unknown			
Short-term			No
Other			
Owner			
Boarding house/caravan/cabin	Yes	No	No
Crisis accommodation	Yes	No	No
Renter			
Dwelling type			
Boarding house/caravan cabin	Yes	No	No
Primary homelessness	No	No	No
Proper dwelling	Yes		
Crisis accommodation	Yes	No	No
Other			

Housing situation	Adequacy	Appropriateness	Security
Hotel	Yes	No	No
Unknown			
Institution	Institution	Institution	Institution

Source: Authors.

4 The final set of decisions combined the various measures to provide a more nuanced picture. The process was more intuitive than preceding steps, though still based on what could reasonably be assumed, in the absence of other information.

Take the following example:

Housing	Occupancy	Tenure	Dwelling types
Secondary homelessness	Not on lease	Boarding house/caravan/cabin	Crisis accommodation

A reasonable assumption to make here is that someone in this combination of circumstances is living in short-term brokered accommodation in a boarding house or a caravan or cabin at a caravan park. They are not on a lease because the accommodation is short-term, but they do have shelter. However, boarding houses and caravan parks are marginal and often stressful environments and would be even more so for women and children seeking to leave DFV. Therefore, this combination of circumstances was assessed as: Adequate, Not appropriate, Not secure.

5 Once each set of circumstances had been classified according to adequacy, appropriateness and security, they were further collapsed into one of the five overall categories as shown.

Table A7: Methods: Final classification of housing situations for analysis

Housing situation	Final classification
Any institutional setting	Institution
Not adequate (or appropriate or secure)	Not housed
Adequate (but inappropriate and/or insecure)	Poorly housed
Adequate, appropriate and secure	Well housed
Not enough data available to make a definition decision	Status uncertain

Source: authors.

The data was manipulated, and all calculations involved were completed, in Excel.

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