

# Out of the shadows

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Domestic and family violence: a leading cause of homelessness in Australia

**MISSION**  
**AUSTRALIA**





# Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands throughout Australia and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and we recognise the importance of the young people who are the future leaders.

We also wish to acknowledge the many victim-survivors of domestic and family violence across Australia. Their stories must be heard if we are to prevent and address domestic and family violence and the homelessness that occurs as a consequence. We hope that this report adds to the evidence, raises awareness and amplifies calls for policy changes to end the violence and end homelessness.

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We would also like to thank the many Mission Australia staff who contributed to this report and also the valuable review and feedback provided by Domestic Violence NSW, Homelessness NSW, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand and Our Watch.

**If the information presented raises any issues for you, these services can help:**

**1800RESPECT**

1800 737 732, [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)

**Lifeline**

13 11 14, [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

**Kids Helpline**

1800 551 800, [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

**Men's Referral Service**

1300 766 491, [ntv.org.au](http://ntv.org.au)

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# CEO message

**Domestic and family violence as an issue has gained increasing media attention and public awareness and I am pleased to see this critical and widespread problem emerge from the shadows. While we often hear about the most tragic cases when they make media headlines, we're less likely to be exposed to the stories of survival, of breaking the cycle and the strength and resilience that this requires. All too often, experiences of domestic and family violence end in homelessness. We cannot let this be the end of the story.**

As a police officer and social worker in the United Kingdom and whilst living and working in Australia, I have seen the devastation that domestic and family violence brings to families and communities. Now as the CEO of an organisation committed to ending homelessness, I know that to have any hope of doing so we must prioritise preventing and addressing domestic and family violence.

The number of people seeking help from homelessness services as a result of domestic and family violence is on the rise. While domestic and family violence can affect anyone, regardless of their culture, gender, economic status or sexuality, overwhelmingly, violence perpetrated by men against women is the most common. As a consequence, women and children are at greatest risk of homelessness. There are also certain groups of people who are more at risk of domestic and family violence and homelessness, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children and women with disability. We must acknowledge the enormity and reality of the problem if we are going to work towards real and lasting change.

No one should be forced to stay in a violent home to keep a roof over their child's head. Yet, we know that there are thousands of families in Australia who have been pushed into homelessness because their home is no longer a safe place to live.

We have remarkable staff who work with victim-survivors and perpetrators of domestic and family violence every day in homelessness services, as well as youth services, alcohol and drug rehabilitation services, mental health services and other family and children's services. It is not easy work and I want to thank them for their perseverance and compassion in sometimes harrowing circumstances.

Above all, I want to acknowledge the victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and their enormous courage. We stand beside them in advocating for much needed change. As a society, we must listen to these stories that are not always easy to hear and make the tough changes needed to redress gender imbalances, provide coordinated and therapeutic responses, improve economic security and ensure there are a range of housing options.

**Addressing both domestic and family violence and homelessness is a vital part of Mission Australia's work through both direct service provision and by being a courageous voice for change. It is my hope that this paper will add to the many voices calling for more universal prevention, better responses to violence and a national strategy to end homelessness that takes into account the drivers of homelessness and ensures everyone has a safe place to call home.**



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James".

**James Toomey**  
CEO, Mission Australia



# Executive summary

**Domestic and family violence is a major driver of homelessness in Australia, particularly for women and their children. This paper seeks to draw attention to the intersections between these issues, draw out the evidence and put forward recommendations for change.**

Despite growing awareness of domestic and family violence in recent years, prevalence rates remain high. Approximately 17% of women and 6% of men have experienced violence by a partner since they were 15. Further, 75% of victim-survivors of domestic and family violence reported the perpetrator as male, compared with 25% reporting the perpetrator as female.<sup>1</sup>

Of the almost 290,000 clients who sought assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services in 2017-18, 42% (or 121,000 clients) were experiencing domestic and family violence. Nationally, the number of clients reporting they had experienced domestic and family violence and sought assistance from specialist homelessness agencies has risen, on average 9% each year since 2013-14.<sup>2</sup>

Everyone has the right to a safe and secure home. Domestic and family violence undermines safety and can precipitate women leaving their home to find safer accommodation. Childhood experiences of family violence also lead to greater likelihood of adult experiences of both violence and homelessness.

Of the people who sought Specialist Homelessness Services due to domestic and family violence related issues, 78% were female. A large number of these clients were children with 34% or nearly 42,000 aged under 18.<sup>3</sup> Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness among children in Australia and has a range of other negative effects on their mental, emotional, educational and physical wellbeing and development. The particular impacts on children need to be addressed.

There are also different risks and experiences for different groups of people that experience domestic and family violence that require tailored policy responses. This includes children, young people; older women; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI)

people; culturally and linguistically diverse women including those on temporary visas; people living in rural, regional and remote communities; people with disabilities; and male victim-survivors of violence.

There are also a range of cultural, social, situational and personal factors that create the environment in which domestic and family violence can occur. This includes rigid gender roles, male dominance in the family, childhood experiences of violence, unemployment, socioeconomic status, social and geographic isolation and alcohol and other substance abuse.

As an organisation committed to reducing homelessness and strengthening communities, we understand that preventing and intervening early in domestic and family violence as well as supporting the safety and recovery of those experiencing domestic and family violence are key to ending homelessness in Australia. We must also prevent homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence and intervene early and support the safety and recovery of those made homeless by domestic and family violence.

Mission Australia provides services across this spectrum from school-based education, to men's behaviour change programs, crisis and transitional accommodation for women and long-term community housing.

The best way of preventing homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence is to prevent the violence from occurring in the first place. This requires cultural and systemic change to change individual and community attitudes on gender and violence.

When domestic and family violence does occur, it is important that the safety, recovery and wellbeing of those who have experienced domestic and family violence is supported and repeat violence is prevented through integrated services. This can be achieved through flexible service provision at a local level and co-design to meet the needs of various groups affected. Therapeutic interventions should be funded for both adult and child victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and a trauma-informed approach consistently applied.

Adequate policing and legal resources are also required to provide quick responses and meet demand and evidence-based perpetrator interventions should be





funded to prevent future violence. Housing options for men who use violence also enables them to engage with services and reduces the risk of reoffending.

Responses that seek to prevent homelessness or intervene early for those who have experienced domestic and family violence are also required. This includes the expansion of safe at home programs and rapid rehousing options through a housing first model for women who cannot or choose not to stay at home. Additional funding is also required for crisis and transitional housing to meet demand.

In 2017-18, among clients of Specialist Homelessness Services who had experienced domestic and family violence: short-term or emergency accommodation was needed by 40% and received by 70% of those who needed it; long-term housing was needed by 30% with only 4% receiving this service.<sup>4</sup> These figures reveal a significant unmet housing need for people escaping domestic and family violence – particularly for those who are seeking long-term housing.

To effectively reduce homelessness, we need 500,000 more social and affordable homes across Australia, an increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance to relieve rental stress and bi-partisan commitment to a national plan to end homelessness by 2030.

Promoting economic security is also crucial. This includes providing crisis payments through Centrelink to meet basic living needs and enable

women to leave violent relationships and promoting the future economic wellbeing for women through training, education and employment supports. The Commonwealth Government should also ensure adequate income support to people experiencing domestic and family violence to enable them to live safely including single mothers, refugees and those on temporary visas.

There is not one simple answer and we need to work across sectors and silos, fund adequately and holistically and move beyond awareness raising and crisis responses. We can prevent domestic and family violence and we can prevent homelessness and both of these approaches must be a priority as well as addressing domestic and family violence and homelessness when it does occur.

Work has started in many jurisdictions across the country, but there is still much more to be done. This paper highlights many service examples that could be expanded and tailored to the needs of various groups and communities. It also highlights the stories of women and children who have been clients of these services and have demonstrated enormous strength and resilience. The light of public attention must remain and urgent policy responses are required if we are to honour these stories of survival and ensure that we prevent and address both violence and homelessness in the future.





## Introduction

Domestic and family violence continues to affect a large number of Australians each year. Domestic and family violence causes a range of harms, including physical and psychological damage, intergenerational violence, and homelessness.

While domestic and family violence is not limited to one group, culture, gender, or sexuality, overwhelmingly it is violence perpetrated by men against women and it is women and children who are at greatest risk of homelessness as a consequence.

In Australia, domestic and family violence is one of the major reasons that women and children leave their homes.<sup>5</sup> Data collected from Specialist Homelessness Services show that domestic and family violence is the most common main reason for seeking assistance from these services, and that the number of clients who reported that they have experienced domestic and family violence has increased an average of 9% each year between 2012-13 and 2017-18.<sup>6</sup>



## Mission Australia's commitment to helping those affected by domestic and family violence and homelessness

**Mission Australia's strategic goal is to reduce homelessness and strengthen communities. In 2017-18, Mission Australia supported nearly 120,000 people through 461 programs and services. This included 67 housing and homelessness services Australia-wide, which together assisted over 20,000 people, many of whom were escaping domestic and family violence.**

Mission Australia also operates a smaller number of services that are specifically established to assist people with domestic and family violence issues, providing either prevention or crisis-focused services. These include crisis or transitional accommodation for women and children, advocacy services, and men's behaviour change programs.

Many Mission Australia clients disclose experiences of domestic and family violence – not only in domestic

and family violence-specific or homelessness services, but across the range of services offered. Of the people supported during the last financial year, 8.6% disclosed experiencing domestic and family violence and an additional 6.1% were suspected of experiencing domestic and family violence by the service staff. Our staff across a range of services see the frequent interaction between domestic and family violence and homelessness to which the research points.

Addressing both domestic and family violence and homelessness – and the ways in which they intersect – is a vital part of Mission Australia's work through both direct service provision and by being a courageous voice for change. Our services facilitate people to feel safe and one of our measures of success is that clients are able to live in homes that are free from violence. We are also advocating for a national plan to end homelessness which must address the drivers of homelessness including domestic and family violence, rapidly rehouse people who become homeless and address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the homelessness system.<sup>7</sup>

## Responses to domestic and family violence-driven homelessness

- Respectful relationship programs
- Community mobilising and strengthening
- Organisational development

LoveBITES

- Rapid rehousing
- Safe at home programs
- Housing for men who use violence

Staying Home Leaving Violence



- Risk identification
- Policing and justice responses
- Perpetrator interventions
- Supporting the families of victim-survivors

Manin' Up

- Housing supports
- Non-housing supports

Women's Safe Houses



# Key definitional issues and scope of paper

## Domestic and family violence:

There is no consistent definition of domestic and family violence in Australia and definitions differ according to the legislation in each of the Australian States and Territories.<sup>8</sup>

However, the key ideas about family violence and domestic violence are included in these descriptions from the AIHW's 2018 report on family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia:<sup>9</sup>

**Family violence** refers to violence between family members as well as between current or former intimate partners. For example, it can include acts of violence between a parent and a child or between siblings. Family violence is the preferred term for violence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as it covers the extended family and kinship relationships in which violence may occur.

... **domestic violence** is considered a subset of family violence. It refers to violent behaviour between current or former intimate partners – typically, where one partner tries to exert power and control over the other, usually through fear. It can include physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse. Behaviour towards the victim can include limiting their access to finances, preventing them from contacting family and friends, demeaning and humiliating them, threatening them or their children with injury or death, and acts of physical violence.<sup>10</sup>

We recognise the devastating impact that different forms of violence have on children in particular. This can lead to children and young people becoming homeless with a parent or guardian or becoming homeless alone when

leaving a violent home. While the co-occurrence of domestic and family violence and child abuse is common, child abuse sits largely outside the scope of this position paper as it is an issue that warrants close examination in its own right.

This position paper also focuses on violence against an intimate partner or former intimate partner, but recognises that it can also involve violence perpetrated by extended family or other community members. The importance of looking beyond intimate partner violence has been particularly highlighted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities and for people with disability and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people.

## Victim-survivor:

In this report we use the term 'victim-survivor' to describe those who have been subjected to domestic and family violence. This acknowledges both that violence has been perpetrated against them but also that, in most cases, they have survived and have been able to escape the violence and reconstruct their lives.

## Gender:

Gender is a term that refers to socially learnt roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women, rather than their biological differences. Gender defines masculinity and femininity and gender expectations can vary between cultures and change over time.<sup>11</sup> In this report, we acknowledge that gender norms, roles, identities and relationships are important factors in the perpetration of domestic and



family violence, that adherence to rigid gender roles and identities are a significant contributor to the perpetration of violence by men against women.<sup>12</sup>

### **Gendered patterns of violence:**

Most men are not perpetrators of violence and while both men and women experience violence, there are gendered patterns in violence perpetration and victimisation. Women are much more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner, and with more severe impacts including hospitalisation or death. Understanding gendered patterns is crucial for understanding domestic and family violence and developing effective responses including preventative measures.<sup>13</sup>

### **Homelessness:**

The ABS statistical definition<sup>14</sup> states that 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.

In this paper, homelessness includes circumstances where people are living in improvised dwellings such as tents or rough sleeping, supported accommodation, boarding houses or other temporary lodging and severely overcrowded houses. It also includes people living in extremely poor quality housing, living in inadequate housing (including garages), people in involuntary sharing arrangements and people who are couch surfing.

Those who are subjected to domestic and family violence and remain housed may not be counted as homeless for the purpose of the ABS Census, however they would be considered at high risk of homelessness as they are living in an unsafe arrangement.





## The relationship between domestic and family violence and homelessness

### Pathways into homelessness

Domestic and family violence is identified across the research literature as one of the key pathways into homelessness in Australia.<sup>15</sup> Concern for safety – their own or their children’s – may lead women experiencing domestic and family violence into homelessness. Women reach a crisis point, whether after a single incident of violence, or an escalating series of incidents, at which point they need to leave their home to find safer accommodation.<sup>16</sup>

Women will often cycle in and out of homelessness as they try to rebuild their relationship with their partner, usually for their children’s benefit.<sup>17</sup> Reasons given for returning to a violent partner include the partner’s promise to stop the violence, returning for the sake of the children, limited financial resources, having nowhere else to go, and fear of the partner. Separation heightens the risk of serious assault and homicide in relationships where there is a history of violence.<sup>18</sup>

Children and young people can be exposed to the domestic and family violence of parents and guardians and can also experience homelessness when leaving home alone or with a parent or guardian to escape domestic and family violence.<sup>19</sup>

### Interactions between violence and housing over time

One of the most significant sources of information about pathways through homelessness is the *Journeys Home* study. The *Journeys Home: A Longitudinal Study of Factors Affecting Housing Stability* was a three-year research project that tracked 1,700 Australians who were homeless or in insecure housing and aimed to identify the factors that lead to homelessness and the support strategies required to exit from it.<sup>20</sup>

Among many other issues that were the subject of the study, the *Journeys Home* data reveal the interactions between violence and housing insecurity over time. An investigation into this relationship established that men’s and women’s experiences of violence and housing insecurity are very different. One in seven of the women in the *Journeys Home* study experienced physical violence in a given six-month period. Intimate partners perpetrated most of that violence, and women were much more likely than men to report being harmed or experiencing anxiety as a result of violence (men experienced more violence than women, but it was less likely to be perpetrated by intimate partners and therefore not included as domestic and family violence).<sup>21</sup>

Among women who were in secure housing, an episode of violence increased their chances of subsequently being in insecure housing, which is consistent with domestic and family violence causing housing problems. For women already in insecure housing, an episode of violence reduced their chances of future housing security, which can result in poor mental health among women.<sup>22</sup>

### Intergenerational cycle of violence and homelessness

There are a number of ways in which the experience of domestic and family violence as a child can translate into intergenerational cycles of violence and homelessness, although this is in no way automatic or inevitable:

- **Childhood experiences of domestic and family violence can lead to greater likelihood of adult experiences of violence:** Research links the experience of domestic and family



violence in childhood to later re-victimisation, possibly through the development of trauma as a result of harm which impacts the ability to form attachments and healthy relationships in adulthood, or through modelling of parental relationships and the normalisation of violence.<sup>23</sup> Childhood exposure to domestic and family violence has also been linked to future perpetration, but some research suggests that it is other risk factors associated with domestic and family violence – such as socioeconomic disadvantage, parental mental illness, parental substance misuse, gender roles and attitudes that support violence – that more directly lead to later perpetration.<sup>24</sup>

- **Childhood experiences of domestic and family violence lead to greater likelihood of adult homelessness:** Various studies have also found a link between childhood traumas including abuse and lack of parental care and later adult homelessness. Data from the *Journeys Home* study indicate that people who are homeless or in insecure housing have had high rates of childhood neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse, and that childhood abuse was also associated with longer durations of homelessness.<sup>25</sup>

## Overview of domestic and family violence in Australia

### Prevalence

Despite being the focus of serious national policy attention in recent years, there are still high and sustained levels of domestic and family violence in Australia. While there may be some increased willingness to disclose due to increases in awareness and decreases in stigma, the numbers remain alarming.

In 2017, there were 126 victims recorded of domestic and family violence related homicide and related offences.<sup>26</sup> This demonstrates the gravity of this issue and the need to immediately increase supports for women experiencing domestic and family violence including crisis, transitional and long-term accommodation and to increase investment in prevention.

### Life time prevalence of partner violence

An estimated 17% of women (1.6 million) and 6.1% of men (547,600) have experienced at least one incidence of violence by a partner since they were 15 years old. Further, 16% of women (1.5 million) and 5.9% of men (528,8010) have experienced physical violence from a partner. Sexual violence from a partner is also more common among women than men, with 5.1% of women (480,200) and 0.6% of men (53,000) reporting this experience.<sup>27</sup>

### 12-month prevalence of partner violence

The proportion of people experiencing partner violence over a 12-month period has stayed relatively stable over time. According to data from successive Personal Safety Surveys<sup>28</sup>, the proportion of women in Australia aged 18+ reporting they experienced partner violence in the previous 12 months was 1.5% in 2005, 1.5% in 2012 and 1.7% in 2016.

There has been a small increase in the proportion of men aged 18+ reporting they experienced partner violence from 0.4% in 2005, to 0.6% in 2012 and 0.8% in 2016.<sup>29</sup>



### Experience of domestic and family violence

People who experience partner violence are much more likely to have experienced it from a male than a female partner<sup>30</sup> as 75% (1.6 million) of victims of domestic and family violence reported the perpetrator as male, compared with 25% (0.5 million) reporting the perpetrator as female.<sup>31</sup>

Experiences of domestic and family violence tend to be repeated, with more than half of women (54%) who reported having experienced violence from their current partner having experienced more than one incident.<sup>32</sup>

Women are killed and hospitalised at significantly higher rates than males as a result of domestic and family violence. In 2014–15, on average, almost eight women and two men were hospitalised each day after being assaulted by their spouse or partner. From 2012-13 to 2013-14, about one woman a week and one man a month were killed as a result of violence from a current or previous partner.<sup>33</sup>

### Risk factors

There are a number of risk factors for the perpetration or victimisation of domestic and family violence, including individual, relationship, community and societal factors:

- Individual factors can include low income or unemployment, heavy alcohol or drug use, anger and hostility, social isolation, belief in strict gender roles, and a history of abuse.
- Relationship factors can include dominance and control by one partner over the other, economic stress, recent separation between partners and unhealthy family relationships and interactions.
- Community factors can include poverty and associated issues (including overcrowded housing), low social capital, and weak community sanctions against domestic and family violence.
- Societal factors can include condoning of violence against women; rigid gender, men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life.<sup>34</sup>

### Alcohol and other drug use and domestic and family violence

Alcohol and drugs are commonly present during incidents of domestic violence. In the ABS 2012 *Personal Safety Survey*,<sup>35</sup> an estimated 53% of women who experienced some form of physical assault by a male reported that alcohol or drugs had been involved.<sup>36</sup> Domestic and family violence offending among methamphetamine users is at least three times more common than among non-users, with a substantially higher likelihood among psychotic users.<sup>37</sup>

A recent review of the research has indicated that alcohol use is strongly associated with violence against women in three ways:

- Alcohol use is linked with the perpetration of violence against women, with research showing increased likelihood, frequency and severity under circumstances of alcohol use.
- Alcohol use is linked with the victimisation of women through violence.
- Alcohol is used as a coping strategy by women who have been subjected to violence, which can have the unintended consequence of further increasing victimisation.<sup>38</sup>

Heavy alcohol consumption by a small proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men is thought to be a major contributor to violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



communities. More than two in three (68%) Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over who had experienced physical violence in the last 12 months reported that alcohol or other substances contributed to the most recent incident (70% of males compared with 67% of females). This was significantly higher in remote and very remote areas (76%) than in major cities, inner regional and outer regional areas (65%).<sup>39</sup>

Numerous bodies have highlighted the need to provide holistic supports, given the high prevalence of domestic and family violence within the population receiving alcohol and drug related treatments.<sup>40</sup>

However, it is important to note that domestic and family violence is not always associated with alcohol consumption, nor is alcohol consumption always associated with domestic and family violence. The use of alcohol is associated with 50% of domestic assaults reported to police in Australia,<sup>41</sup> and of the clients receiving Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) support in 2017-18 who had experienced domestic and family violence, only 11.1% also reported problematic drug and/or alcohol use.<sup>42</sup>



## Tom's story

**Tom\* was placed in juvenile custody at age 17 after he physically assaulted his partner, her mother and another young woman. Soon after being released, he was returned to custody after once again physically abusing his partner. In addition to these ongoing incidents of violence, Tom also struggled with alcohol and cannabis use, and his high-risk behaviour saw him referred to Mission Australia's Mac River residential rehabilitation program.**

Early in his time at Mac River, Tom's partner had a baby. With supervision he was allowed to visit her and the baby, and the Mac River program helped prepare him to return home on a more permanent basis. Tom participated in a parenting program that addressed the impact a child can have on relationships and home dynamics. Staff also implemented a domestic and family violence intervention program for Tom given his ongoing pattern of behaviour.

Mission Australia staff used elements of our Mannin' Up program (outlined below) as they worked with Tom. Thorough risk assessments were conducted with both Tom and his partner to ensure she was safe and the support offered continued to meet their needs. His partner was provided with her own dedicated support worker and disclosed a range of concerning behaviours Tom had demonstrated. One particularly concerning behaviour was that Tom had put a lock on the bedroom door that only he had a key to, which he used to isolate his partner from her family.

The support program focused on Tom's behaviour and accountability. Tom continuously stated that he blacked out when he drank alcohol and felt that his actions were not his fault. When he was encouraged to look back at different incidents, however, he became aware that he did remember a lot of details. Through this process, he realised that there were numerous points where he could have made better decisions.

Staff then tried to get to the core of why Tom made the decisions he did. They explored his own experiences as a young person, and discovered that he had witnessed domestic violence as a child.

They explored how that impacted his definition of a relationship and expectations compared with those of his partner. Over time, staff worked with Tom to see relationships as not being about ownership and control. Staff asked Tom to refer to his partner by her name instead of "my woman" or other similar terms he used regularly, and talked about how the language he used could show respect or disrespect.

Tom completed the residential rehabilitation program successfully and returned to live with his partner and child. He continued to receive support for a period of time after returning to his family.

Tom is a good example of the need for targeted intervention for men engaged in serious domestic violence, including those of a young age who may require more than the respectful relationship education offered through schools in order to change their behaviours.

\* Name changed to protect the identity of this person





## Overview of homelessness in Australia

The widely accepted definition of homelessness in Australia, used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics is as follows:

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.<sup>43</sup>

This definition sees homelessness as about more than not having a roof over one's head. It leads to six categories of living situations in which the person is considered to be homeless:

1. Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out
  - a. Persons sleeping out (where available)
  - b. Persons living in improvised dwellings or tents (where available)
2. Persons living in short term supported accommodation for the homeless (where available)
3. Persons staying temporarily with other households
  - a. Persons staying temporarily with friends and relatives (where available)
  - b. Persons staying temporarily in visitor only households (where available)
4. Persons living in boarding houses
5. Persons living temporarily in other lodgings
6. Persons living in severely crowded dwellings

This definition does *not* include people who are at risk of homelessness or who are in housing situations that put them at risk of homelessness. This means that it does not necessarily include people who are living in unsafe situations due to domestic and family violence. Under the ABS definition:<sup>44</sup>

... a person displaced from their home due to domestic violence becomes homeless if they have a temporary living situation and do not have access to accommodation alternatives that are secure, safe and adequate (and the home in which they were subject to domestic violence is not considered a safe alternative accommodation to their homeless situation).

A person experiencing the violence who remains in their unsafe home with the perpetrator, could be considered to lack control of and access to social relations. However, assessing these situations in a measurement context is very difficult, and the ABS definition currently excludes such situations from its definition of homelessness and characterises their living situation as being precarious or unstable and being at risk of homelessness

While people who are living in unsafe housing due to the experience of domestic and family violence are not captured by the ABS definition or in Census statistics, they are at risk of homelessness and are therefore captured in this paper's discussion and recommendations.

## Prevalence - Census

The main way of measuring how many people are homeless in Australia is via the Census every five years. On Census night 2016, there were 116,427 people counted as homeless in Australia, an increase of 13.7% from 102,439 in 2011. This included:

1. 8,200 people (7% of the total homeless counted) in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out

2. 21,235 people (18%) in supported accommodation for the homeless
3. 17,725 people (15%) staying temporarily with other households
4. 17,503 people (15%) living in boarding houses
5. 678 people (1%) in other temporary lodging
6. 51,088 (44%) in severely crowded dwellings.<sup>45</sup>

## Where do they stay?



\* For 'Persons living in severely crowded dwellings', the level of crowding is estimated according to the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS). The 'severely' overcrowded classification includes usual residents in dwellings needing 4 or more extra bedrooms under the CNOS.

Source: Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016

Of people who were homeless on Census night, 42% were female and 58% were male, 14% were children aged under 12 and 24% were young people aged 12 to 24<sup>46</sup>.

It is not possible to estimate the number of people who were homeless due to domestic and family violence using Census data, as the information to support this analysis is not collected.

Furthermore, the ABS notes that people who are homeless as a result of domestic and family violence are likely to be undercounted in the Census for the following reasons:

- They may not record themselves on a Census form for the dwelling they are staying in, out of fear.
- They may be reluctant to report having no usual address on Census night for a range of reasons, including stigma.
- They may expect to be able to return to their home in their future and do not see themselves as having no usual address.



These reasons mean that they cannot be distinguished from other people who were 'visiting' on Census night, and estimates for this group must therefore be recognised as an undercount. As noted above, the Census also cannot estimate the number of people at risk of homelessness due to domestic and family violence.

The ABS has included questions about accommodation for those who have left a violent current or previous partner in the Personal Safety Survey. The ABS acknowledges that further work needs to be done to develop a better enumeration methodology for this group in the 2021 Census, but also recognises the need to use other data sources to gain a more complete picture of homelessness.

### **Prevalence – Specialist Homelessness Services**

The other major source of information about homelessness are the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) annual reports of the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. These give details of the people who seek assistance each year from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) around Australia. These services are available to people who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness and include accommodation and support services.

Domestic and family violence is the main reason women and children leave their homes in Australia and is consistently one of the most common reasons clients seek SHS assistance.<sup>47</sup> In 2017-18, almost 290,000 clients sought assistance from SHS agencies.<sup>48</sup>

In 2017-18, 42% (or 121,000) of all clients of SHS in Australia – were experiencing domestic and family violence. Of the people who sought SHS due to domestic and family violence related issues, more than three out of four or 78% were female. A large number of these clients were children – 22% (around 26,500) were children aged zero to nine, and 34% (nearly 42,000) were aged under 18.

<sup>49</sup>

Of the 121,100 people, 61% sought assistance while they were at risk of homelessness, and 39% sought assistance while they were homeless. Nearly half (47%) of those experiencing domestic and family violence were single parents with a child or children.<sup>50</sup>

In 2017–18, on average, there were 236 requests per day which were unable to be met; a total of 86,100 unmet requests, 9,300 fewer than the previous year (95,400). The majority of unassisted requests for assistance came from females (66%). Within the group of clients experiencing domestic and family violence, around half (52%) had sought assistance from an SHS within the previous 12 months, indicating a large proportion of returning clients.<sup>51</sup>

Data on rough sleepers receiving support from SHS between 2011-12 and 2014-15 show that 23% had reported experiencing domestic and family violence at least once. They were much more likely to be younger than older (56% of those reporting domestic and family violence incidents were aged under 35, compared with 9% aged 50 and over). Female rough sleepers were four times as likely as males to report having experienced domestic and family violence (46% compared with 11%). Female rough sleepers who were persistent service users (those who presented to SHS in each year of the reporting period) were very likely to report having experienced domestic and family violence (74%) compared with 16% of male rough sleeping persistent service users.<sup>52</sup>

### Reasons for seeking assistance and other presenting issues

Of those clients who reported experiencing domestic and family violence, there were two main reasons given for seeking assistance from SHS agencies:

- By far the majority of the clients (71%) identified the violence as their main reason for seeking support.
- A smaller number (10%) identified housing crisis as their main reason for seeking support.<sup>53</sup>

There was some co-occurrence of mental health and alcohol and other drug issues with these clients, but in relatively small proportions. Of those experiencing domestic and family violence:

- One-quarter (25.7%) also presented with mental health issues;
- 2.8% also reported problematic drug and/or alcohol use; and
- 8.3% presented with co-morbid mental health and problematic alcohol and/or drug use.<sup>54</sup>

### Trends over time

Nationally, the number of clients reporting they had experienced domestic and family violence and sought assistance from SHS agencies has risen, on average 9% each year since 2013–14. Most of these additional clients were single parent households (with a child or children).<sup>55</sup>

Tasmanian SHS agencies experienced the greatest average annual growth of domestic and family violence clients (13% each year), followed by the Northern Territory (11% each year); however, Victoria has the largest number of clients.<sup>56</sup>

Among clients experiencing domestic and family violence, rates of homelessness are rising. The proportion of clients who were homeless upon presentation has increased, from 37% in 2013–14 to 39% in 2017–18. The proportion of clients ending support with improved housing outcomes increased over the period, particularly for those in private housing (from 46% in 2013–14 to 48% in 2017–18).<sup>57</sup>

### Risk factors

Homelessness has a number of risk factors that are both structural and individual including:

- Inadequate or unstable or unsafe accommodation conditions or overcrowding issues, termination of accommodation situations;
- Transitions in custodial and care arrangements, such as exits from out of home care, hospitals and correctional facilities;
- Financial stress, gambling problems, housing affordability crises;
- Educational disengagement, underemployment and unemployment;
- Mental health issues and alcohol, drug and/or substance misuse;
- Relationship or family breakdown, child abuse or neglect, sexual assault, and domestic and family violence;
- Discrimination, particularly in the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- Lack of family and community support.<sup>58</sup>

There are often multiple potential ways in which risk factors might play out into an individual's experience of homelessness.<sup>59</sup> The pathway from domestic and family violence to homelessness is the focus of this paper, but other factors are interconnected and need to be considered as part of a comprehensive policy response.



## Current policy responses to domestic and family violence and homelessness in Australia

The primary vehicle for domestic and family violence policy at the national level is the **National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, 2010-2022** (The National Plan).<sup>60</sup> The National Plan is a 12-year plan supported by four consecutive three-year Action Plans, focussing on the two types of violent crimes that most impact women in Australia – domestic and family violence and sexual assault. The Fourth Action Plan 2019-2022 is currently in development, and will be the final action plan of the National Plan.<sup>61</sup>

The National Plan provides a framework for the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments to reduce violence against women and their children, and provides a mechanism for coordinated action across jurisdictions.

The vision of the National Plan is that ‘Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities’, with an overall target of ‘a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children, 2010-2022’. Indicators used to measure progress against this target are:

- Reduced prevalence of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Increased proportion of women who feel safe in their communities.
- Reduced deaths related to domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Reduced proportion of children exposed to their mother’s or carer’s experience of domestic violence.

The National Plan recognises the links between domestic and family violence and homelessness, and includes initiatives such as:

- Increasing the numbers of families who maintain or secure long term safe and sustainable housing post-violence.
- Implementing homelessness services to improve housing options for victim-survivors of violence – including but not limited to Safe at Home-type supports.
- Ensuring wraparound support to those who have experienced domestic and family violence.
- Increasing affordable housing stock.
- Recognising the risk of perpetrators returning home if there is a lack of accommodation available to them.

Various national initiatives have been established under the National Plan, including Our WATCH, an independent not-for-profit organisation dedicated to raising awareness and engaging the community in action to prevent violence against women and their children, and Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS), an independent research organisation designed to inform policy and practice.

Some State and Territory governments also have overarching plans to prevent and address domestic and family violence and some States have conducted comprehensive inquiries including:

- *ACT Government response to Family Violence*<sup>62</sup>.
- *New South Wales - Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform*.<sup>63</sup>
- *Northern Territory - Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018-2028*<sup>64</sup>.

- Queensland - *Not now, Not ever: Putting an End to Domestic and Family Violence* (the Domestic and Family Violence Taskforce Report) <sup>65</sup> and the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy*.<sup>66</sup>
- South Australia - *Committed to Safety: A Framework for addressing domestic, family and sexual violence in South Australia*.<sup>67</sup>
- Tasmania - *Safe Homes, Safe Families: Tasmania's Family Violence Action Plan*.<sup>68</sup>
- Victoria - *Royal Commission into Family Violence*<sup>69</sup> and the Victorian Government's *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change*.<sup>70</sup>
- Western Australia - *Western Australia's Family and Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy to 2022*<sup>71</sup> and consultation is occurring on a *10 year strategy for reducing domestic and family violence*<sup>72</sup> and

The primary vehicle for homelessness policy at the national level is the **National Housing and Homelessness Agreement** (NHHA).<sup>73</sup> The State and Territory Governments' homelessness policies that support the NHHA include varying degrees of focus on people affected by domestic and family violence.

## Issues for particular cohorts

There are different risks and experiences for particular population groups or cohorts who experience domestic and family violence. While specific risks and experiences are set out by cohort below, it is important to recognise that for many Australians, their individual identity and thus their lived experience of domestic and family violence and homelessness can be compounded by more than one attribute. For example, children and young people, may also be living in rural, regional and remote communities and immigrants and refugees may be living with a disability.

### Children

A large body of research on the impact on children of exposure to domestic and family violence now indicates that children may be exposed to or involved in domestic and family violence in a range of ways, extending beyond witnessing violence, to being forced to watch or participate or intervening to stop violence occurring.<sup>74</sup> Although historically children have been seen as passive witnesses to violence, recent thinking has focused on the active roles that they take in relation to violent situations, often seeking to maximise the safety of their siblings, the non-violent parents, and themselves.<sup>75</sup> However, both perpetrators and victims of violence can be unaware that their children are being harmed by exposure to violence, even if the violence is not specifically directed towards the children.<sup>76</sup>

The exposure of children to domestic and family violence has a range of negative effects, including poor mental wellbeing, educational outcomes, a range of behavioural issues and trauma. Children who are exposed to domestic and family violence often also suffer other forms of child abuse or neglect, and are more likely to become caught in cycles of intergenerational violence (whether as a repeat victim or future perpetrator).<sup>77</sup> Children's exposure to domestic and family violence is also required to be notified to child protection authorities in many cases.

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness among children in Australia, which itself has significant effects on children's physical and mental wellbeing, as well as disrupting



children's education, friendships, and links to community and cultural activities.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, research has shown that there is a lack of collaboration between child protection services and domestic and family violence sector agencies.<sup>79</sup>

Children may have additional specific needs distinct from their parents and this needs to be taken into account in policy approaches and by support services.

## Eliza's story

**Eliza\* and Aaron\* had been married for several years and had five children together. While Aaron was incarcerated for drink driving offences, Eliza took the opportunity to go to police to report historical domestic and family violence. She told police that Aaron had a history of alcohol and drug use and had perpetrated domestic and family violence. At times, this included extreme verbal abuse, threats to kill Eliza and the children, accusations of affairs and physical violence. Eliza reported that on one occasion Aaron held her at knife-point while pregnant. She desperately wanted to escape the situation, but was too fearful. She contacted police on several occasions to tip them off when Aaron had been drinking and driving, leading to his incarceration.**

Apprehended Violence Orders were put in place against Aaron and he was sentenced to a Good Behaviour Bond for domestic and family violence related offences.

Eliza struggled as a single parent. Her eldest son would mimic the misuse of power and control his father demonstrated, forcing Eliza to relive the trauma she endured. This put increased pressure on Eliza as she sought to care for her other children who needed support after the violence they were exposed to.

In addition to dealing with trauma, one of Eliza's daughters had a serious medical condition. Her ability to attend medical appointments and pay for treatment was made difficult due to the constant supervision and attention required in caring for her triplets. She wanted to enrol the triplets into mainstream child care but struggled to find an appropriate arrangement due to a lack of vacancies and the family's remote location.

When Mission Australia started working with the family, Eliza was extremely fearful. She had low self-esteem and extreme fatigue due to the high demands of caring for her children. The support worker helped Eliza focus on prioritising her family's safety, aiding her healing process and building her confidence as a parent. Staff also

helped Eliza find in-home child care, allowing her to return to part-time work.

The triplets now attend a local mainstream child care centre one day per week, which has significantly improved their wellbeing. All three are now meeting their developmental milestones. Since implementing these changes, Eliza has reported a significant improvement to her mental health and wellbeing. She has also taken her son to a psychologist, which has helped improve his behaviour and their relationship. With the help of the case worker, Eliza's eldest daughter is being supported to access and navigate the NDIS and is enjoying school.

Eliza now has a strong support system around her, including Mission Australia staff, domestic violence liaison officers, family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Mission Australia has helped her apply for Victims of Crime compensation, helping her fund the installation of security, surveillance and safety technology in her home.

Despite the difficult road she has endured, Eliza continues to show resilience and strength in her journey of healing and recovery. She has consistently thanked her case worker for the support provided, and her son recently said to the case worker: "Thank you for trying to keep us safe. I've really liked you coming over. It's been great."

\*Client names have been changed to protect their privacy





## Young people

Adolescence and young adulthood involve major transitions including from school to work, forming intimate relationships, developing a self-identity and moving out of home for the first time. Young people can be exposed to the domestic and family violence of parents and guardians and can experience domestic and family violence in their own intimate relationships. Young people can also experience homelessness when leaving home alone or with a parent or guardian to escape domestic and family violence.<sup>80</sup>

There were around 43,200 young people aged 15-24 who presented alone to a SHS agency in 2017-18. Almost two in five (37% or 15,800 clients) reported domestic and family violence.<sup>81</sup> Part of intervening early includes preventing and responding to domestic and family violence among young people. Intervening early in the life-course can prevent ongoing cycles of domestic and family violence into adulthood.

Young people recognise family violence as a problem, but are less informed about domestic and family violence and relationship violence than older people and may have been influenced by beliefs that encourage or excuse violence.<sup>82</sup> However, most young people agree that it is men or more often by men who commit domestic violence (71%) and that women are most likely to suffer physical harm (87%)<sup>83</sup>.

Providing violence prevention education in adolescence when an understanding of relationships is being developed is therefore an important measure to break the cycle of violence and has strong prospects of success.<sup>84</sup>

In Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2018*, 10% of young people were personally concerned about domestic and family violence with a higher percentage of young females than young males indicating these concerns. More females than males also indicated family conflict was a personal concern (21.6% of females compared with 11.6% of males). Young females also indicated that security/safety was a barrier to moving out of home at twice the rate of young males (28% compared to 14%).<sup>85</sup>

We also know from our Youth Survey sub-report on *Young people's experiences of homelessness* that there is a strong link between young people who were concerned about family conflict and experiences of homelessness adding to the impetus to reduce domestic and family violence as a driver of homelessness for young people.<sup>86</sup> Young people may experience family violence in the process of 'coming out' to family members including abuse, violence, estrangement, disowning and exclusion from the family home<sup>87</sup>.

## Older women

Domestic and family violence is a key driver of homelessness for women of all ages. In many instances, older women will have endured abusive relationships for years, leaving only when children have grown up and left home or an unexpected life event forces them into crisis. This may also be compounded by structural factors such as taking significant breaks from paid employment to take on caring responsibilities and the resulting reduction in superannuation.<sup>88</sup>

The three main reasons older Australians cited for seeking Specialist Homelessness Services in 2017-18 were: housing crisis (21%), domestic and family violence (21%) and financial difficulties (17%).<sup>89</sup> It is possible that this is an underestimate as many older people may not disclose domestic and family violence as a reason when seeking housing support.

Older women are less likely to disclose or report violence for a range of reasons including: shame; fear of isolation; lack of financial resources; difficulty of leaving the home they have lived in for most of their lives; the responsibility of being a caregiver; fear of estrangement from children and/or grandchildren; and lack of knowledge about services, the law and the entitlements available.<sup>90</sup>

Violence and abuse experienced by older people can take many forms including intimate partner violence as well as elder abuse. Elder abuse may be perpetrated by a family member, friend, neighbour or carer, and may take various forms, such as physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. These issues become more complex in the case of older people who are experiencing additional challenges such as physical or cognitive health issues, language barriers, cultural expectations or concerns in relation to family members or loved ones coming into contact with law enforcement or other authorities. All these can result in older people being forced into homelessness or increase the risk of becoming homeless.<sup>91</sup>

Domestic and family violence related services including accommodation supports have historically focused on women with young children. There is also a lack of accommodation options that are affordable for older women on low and moderate incomes. With the emergence of older women leaving abusive relationships, service responses need to expand to target older people escaping violence.<sup>92</sup>

### Yaralla Cottages

Yaralla Cottages in central Sydney comprises 24 one bedroom units, with Mission Australia providing case management support to residents. The program caters for single women aged over 35 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The average age of residents is 50 and in mid-2018, 16 of the 24 residents were women aged over 50 years. Presenting issues include: domestic and family violence; untreated co-morbid health issues (such as poor physical health, mental illness and diabetes); alcohol, other drug and gambling addictions; and family breakdown. Women stay for six months or more until they can be supported into long-term housing options.



### Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people

Attributes of biological sex, gender identity and expression and sexuality are distinct and sometimes overlapping attributes impacting on experiences of domestic and family violence for LGBTI people.

LGBTI people can experience domestic and family violence from current or former intimate partners as well as from other family members who do not accept their sexual or gender identity<sup>93</sup>.



There is limited information on the incidence of domestic and family violence among people in LGBTI relationships. However, research undertaken in NSW in 2014 indicated that domestic and family violence is a significant experience for many LGBTI people.<sup>94</sup> Although the survey underpinning the report was not based on a representative sample, and is therefore unable to give robust prevalence estimates, respondents to the survey indicated experiences of violence and abuse that included:

- 55% had previously been in one or more emotionally abusive relationships.
- 35% had been physically or sexually abused by a previous partner.
- Transgender, gender diverse and intersex respondents were disproportionately affected, with 75% having experienced emotional abuse and 53% having experienced physical and/or sexual abuse.
- Of those in a current relationship:
  - 42% had been verbally abused by their partner.
  - 26% had been emotionally abused by their partner.
  - 22% experienced physical aggression from their partner.

Some types of abuse are unique to LGBTI people, including threatening to 'out' the victim-survivor to people they know, isolating the victim-survivor from the LGBTI community, and pressuring victim-survivors to stop expressing their identity or lived experience.<sup>95</sup>

LGBTI people are also often reluctant to report their experiences of violence and abuse to the police, particularly those who are transgender, gender diverse or intersex. This may be from fear of the police or concern they would not be treated with dignity.<sup>96</sup> Police and domestic and family violence and homelessness services need more training for staff to be able to better cater to unique issues arising for LGBTI people, particularly those who are transgender.

The General Social Survey in Australia conducted by ABS in 2014 recorded that 20.8% of bisexual people and 33.7% of lesbian/gay people had ever been homeless in comparison to 13.4 percent of heterosexuals.<sup>97</sup> Higher levels of homelessness or increased risk of homelessness among LGBTI young people has been attributed to family rejection and/or violence perpetrated by family members.<sup>98</sup>

Transgender people may also experience discrimination due to their gender identity when accessing accommodation and homelessness services.<sup>99</sup> According to a recent survey, 22% of transgender young people had experienced homelessness or accommodation crises and of those transgender young people who were able to access temporary housing or accommodation, 43% reported that gender identity was not respected.<sup>100</sup>

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

### The context of family violence

Family violence is conceptualised differently in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander than non-Indigenous communities.<sup>101</sup> In general, the term 'family violence' is preferred to 'domestic violence' as violence against women is conceptualised within extended families and the wider community, rather than a single intimate partnership. Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is the result of many different forms of oppression including gender and colonial dispossession. It is also most often associated with excessive use of alcohol.<sup>102</sup>

Recent data continue to show that family violence occurs at higher rates in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities than in the general population.<sup>103</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience disproportionately higher risk factors for family violence, including social stressors such as poor housing or overcrowding, poverty and unemployment as a consequence of colonialism, dispossession and racism.

In 2017-18, one in four (25%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sought assistance from a SHS agency because of family violence and almost two in five clients (37% of Indigenous clients aged 10 and over or 18,600 clients) reported experiencing family violence.<sup>104</sup>

Violence is both more prevalent and often more serious for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than for non-Indigenous Australians:

- 14% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women reported experiencing physical violence in the previous year, with around a quarter (28%) of these reporting that the most recent incident was perpetrated by a cohabiting partner.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were 32 times, and men 23 times, as likely to be hospitalised due to family violence as non-Indigenous women and men.
- 41% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander homicide victims were killed by a current or previous partner, nearly double the rate of non-Indigenous homicide victims (22%) during 2012-2014.<sup>105</sup>

It is important to note that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is not a part of traditional culture and that aspects of traditional culture and customary law were respectful and protective of women.<sup>106</sup>

It should also be noted that, despite the public narrative to the contrary, violence against Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women is not always perpetrated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander men. Evidence suggests that non-Indigenous men make up a significant proportion of perpetrators, particularly given that the data showing the majority of partnered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have non-Indigenous partners, especially in capital cities.<sup>107</sup>

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those who have reported experiencing family violence are more likely to experience or be at risk of homelessness and increased poverty.<sup>108</sup> This is especially prevalent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in regional or rural areas where there is a lack of resources and support systems. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also face high levels of discrimination in the private rental market.<sup>109</sup>

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional, rural and remote communities temporary stays at refuges are often used as a way of staying safe. Further dignity and pride are associated with being able to keep their children safe and rely on family.<sup>110</sup>

### Approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence

Whereas mainstream approaches to domestic and family violence are focused on separating victim-survivors from perpetrators and on policing and justice responses, these are not regarded as the most effective way of responding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence.<sup>111</sup>

Because family violence is conceptualised in terms of wider family and community relations, holistic responses that focus on violence prevention, integration with cultural health and healing families have been seen as preferred ways of addressing family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.<sup>112</sup>



There are a number of specialist domestic and family violence services that work with Aboriginal women around Australia, mostly providing crisis accommodation and support.<sup>113</sup> Collaboration with other agencies is essential for these services to operate effectively, particularly with police.

In particular, it is important to recognise that poor housing conditions and severe overcrowding can contribute to making violence worse and increasing the vulnerability of women and children to abuse and violence from a range of potential perpetrators.

Important new approaches to family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities include a focus on social and emotional wellbeing, that draws on connection with law, cultures, and spirituality as protective factors against the occurrence of family violence and putting Elders (male and female) at the centre of interventions wherever possible.<sup>114</sup>

Services designed to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be co-designed and implemented with community members, elders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to ensure they are culturally adapted and effective.

Particularly in regional and remote areas, relationships with the local community and having a strong understanding of local cultures are critical to developing the necessary trust for community members to accept support from services. Further, the location and confidentiality of services are key to uptake of support in small communities.

### **Meekatharra family and domestic violence and emergency accommodation service**

Meekatharra family and domestic violence and emergency accommodation service is available for both crisis intervention as well as for women who recognise escalating patterns of behaviour and wish to remove themselves and their children from potentially dangerous situations and avoid further trauma. In this way, the service is very much part of the safety plan for women in surrounding areas who are at high risk of violence.

The Meekatharra service also works with women and children at risk of homelessness to find suitable safe accommodation either in their community, with relatives in neighbouring communities or elsewhere. Women and children who come into the service are assisted with a range of issues including housing applications, accessing income support through Centrelink and seeking legal advice from appropriate family law services to help them to remain safe.

The majority of women and children accessing this service identify as Aboriginal. The Meekatharra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group (MARG) has played a crucial role in shaping and delivering these services.







## Alice's story

**Alice\* is an Aboriginal young person who has experienced domestic and family violence and homelessness. With very little parental support – her parents were estranged and her mother was dependent on drugs and sleeping rough – Alice left home when she was just 13.**

Alice fell pregnant at an early age and moved in with her partner. After having a second child, their relationship became untenable due to severe domestic and family violence: on one occasion Alice was hospitalised due to head injuries that required her to be on life support for three days.

Alice once reported that her former partner kidnapped their children and returned them with bruises, cigarette burns and one with a broken nose. Following this incident, the children were taken into care of the Department for Child Protection and were placed with a family member with visitation rights.

When Alice was referred to Mission Australia's Youth Accommodation Support Services (YASS), she was experiencing homelessness and mental health issues, was dependent on prescription drugs, and was pregnant with her third child.

YASS case workers registered her with a local medical practice and supported her to attend all her appointments. Alice was also supported to maintain her accommodation using the YASS Behavioural Management and Support Strategy. Alice was supported by YASS to re-engage with education and to address some of her legal issues, including appearing in court over custody of her children.

Alice left YASS in 2017 and moved to a young mothers and children service. Thanks to the support that was in place, Alice was able to keep her third child in her care, and has maintained phone contact with YASS to provide updates on the birth, development of parenting skills and her postnatal experience.

\* Name changed to protect the identity of this person



## Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds may experience violence from their intimate partner, extended family or adult children. Perpetrators of domestic and family violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds may or may not be from a migrant and refugee background themselves.

The experience of migration itself can lead to women becoming socially isolated, and therefore beholden to a partner and possibly his family.<sup>115</sup> Stigma and shame associated with domestic and family violence can result in women from migrant and refugee backgrounds being less willing to speak out or seek assistance and remain in abusive relationships.<sup>116</sup>

Women who are newly arrived in Australia may have limited understanding of Australian laws with respect to domestic and family violence. Many migrant and refugee women are also unfamiliar with services that are available to them, including the police, domestic and family violence services and homelessness services. Lack of early intervention is therefore common among this group, leading to their overrepresentation among those needing crisis services.<sup>117</sup>

The difficulties in accessing social security payments faced by recent migrants, often mean that they are unable to afford to leave violent relationships. People who arrive in Australia from overseas are required to meet certain thresholds of residency before they are eligible for social security payments and while there may be some exceptions for circumstances of domestic and family violence, these may be difficult to navigate.<sup>118</sup> The risks of homelessness for people seeking asylum have also been amplified by changes to the eligibility criteria for the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS), leaving many people without access to income and supports.<sup>119</sup>

Particular visa classes can restrict a woman's access to housing, employment, social security, health care, child care and education, or establish dependency on men where sponsorship is required. Women on temporary visas experiencing violence face particular barriers to support including fear of deportation, loss of custody of their children, lack of social networks, understanding of their rights and English language skills. Perpetrators can use these barriers to maintain power and control and to continue to use violence against women.<sup>120</sup>

There are significant costs for providers when offering services to women who do not have an income or access to Medicare and who require support for complex legal, immigration and protection matters.<sup>121</sup> Women and children in this situation often end up in short-term crisis accommodation and then refuges for a long period of time due to difficulties in accessing the private rental market, having few family members or friends to assist, and long waiting lists for public housing.<sup>122</sup> Services sometimes try to manage the resources required to bear the cost of supporting these women by moving them around to multiple locations.<sup>123</sup>

Although most women from migrant and refugee backgrounds report positive experiences with domestic and family violence and homelessness services, some reported difficulties accessing them due to high demand, and some felt pressured to make life-changing decisions quickly without proper access to an interpreter or sufficient information about their rights and options.<sup>124</sup>

The Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children outlines actions designed to protect migrants who are experiencing domestic and family violence, ensuring that 'migration rules and eligibility requirements for support services do not disempower victims of violence or discourage them from leaving violent relationships'.<sup>125</sup> However there is still much more to be done

The response and support available to women should not be dependent on migration status, but rather the risk and need in relation to experiencing family violence, particularly in relation to access to financial and housing support. Migration status should also be factored into an assessment of risk.<sup>126</sup>

### People living in regional, rural and remote communities

People living in regional, rural and remote communities who are experiencing domestic and family violence have specific barriers to seeking support including social and geographic isolation and a scarcity of housing and services.

Around one quarter (25%) of specialist homelessness service (SHS) clients from inner regional and outer regional areas and 38% of those from remote/very remote areas reported domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking assistance, as compared with around one third (32%) of SHS clients from major cities.<sup>127</sup>

Among specialist domestic and family violence services in regional areas, a scarcity of crisis accommodation and longer-term housing are seen as acute challenges for women. In remote locations, access to services more generally and isolation are viewed as major problems.<sup>128</sup>

Social isolation can be a significant barrier to help-seeking for women experiencing domestic and family violence in rural, regional and remote communities. Women living in regional, rural and remote areas have reported extended periods of coping with domestic and family violence through active strategies such as placating or trying to help the perpetrator and shame and embarrassment which delays help-seeking.<sup>129</sup>

Service in regional, rural and remote areas identified geographical distance and isolation as a factor that determined the ways in which they were able to deliver services. In particular, lack of appropriate resourcing usually meant that efforts were focused on crisis response and risk management at the expense of outreach work.<sup>130</sup>

Community members may also be reluctant to ask for help because of concerns about their privacy in smaller more interconnected communities. It can also make recruiting for skilled staff members in very small communities challenging.

### People living with disabilities

Domestic and family violence is a significant issue for people living with disability. Good quality data about the prevalence and incidence of violence against women living with disabilities is generally limited, and likely to be under-reported.<sup>131</sup> However, data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the *2016 Personal Safety Survey*<sup>132</sup> indicated that women living with disabilities are around 40% more likely to experience domestic and family violence compared to women living without disabilities.

In 2017-18, 23,400 or just over 8% of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients reported one or more limitations with a core activity (self-care, mobility, and/or communication).<sup>133</sup> Further, of 4,500 SHS clients with severe or profound core activity limitations who also experienced additional vulnerabilities, just over 1,800 clients or 40.2% had indicated that they have experienced domestic and family violence.<sup>134</sup>



Forms of domestic and family violence specific to women living with disabilities may include withholding medication or aids, limiting access to disability support or other services, and forms of denigration such as making threats relating to a woman's mothering or caregiving role.<sup>135</sup> Many women living with disabilities experience social isolation as both a risk factor for, and a consequence of, violence.<sup>136</sup> Discriminatory stereotypes also contribute to the belief that women with disability are a burden to those supporting them. This can result in a lack of acknowledgement that formal and informal supporters can be violent towards these individuals.<sup>137</sup>

Women with disability, in particular, face precarious housing situations when leaving their homes to escape violence and abuse. They often face discrimination when looking for rental properties, and may not have sufficient financial resources to set up a new living environment that supports their independence.<sup>138</sup> Some 16% of people living with disability have been served with a 'without grounds' eviction, compared with 9% for the rest of those who rent.<sup>139</sup> It is also estimated that less than 5% of new housing has basic accessibility features such as wider doorways, one entry point for wheelchair users, and a toilet on the ground floor.<sup>140</sup>

People with disability also have housing costs that non-disabled people do not share, including limited availability which can push the market price up, utility costs and the need for modifications. Furthermore, 38% of people with disability live below poverty line<sup>141</sup> and as a result are more likely to be at risk of homelessness due to financial stresses such as additional health care costs and modifications to existing housing.<sup>142</sup>

It is also reported that women with disability are likely to fear that accessing domestic and family violence services will result in them being institutionalised and thus, refrain from raising concerns.<sup>143</sup> Further, it was found that women receiving treatment for a mental health condition are likely to be reluctant to exercise their rights to protect themselves and their children from further violence for fear that the perpetrator may use mental illness to deny access to children.<sup>144</sup>

### Male victim-survivors

Men can also be victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. As discussed in the prevalence data above, violence by women towards male partners is less common and less severe than that of men towards their female partners. Men in same sex relationships can also be victim-survivors of intimate partner violence although prevalence data is lacking in Australia.

Men can face particular challenges in seeking domestic and family violence support services. This includes a lack of information and knowledge about support services, lack of online resources, lack of awareness within services of issues faced by males and an overall lack of service availability for males and males with their children. There is also a possibility that men may be less likely to report domestic and family violence and a perception that they are less likely to be believed.

The service responses set out below apply to victim-survivors of any gender including preventing and responding to the domestic and family violence and preventing and addressing homelessness. Although resources should not be diverted from women and children, who constitute the majority of victim-survivors, the domestic and family violence system needs to better respond to male victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and this requires additional resourcing.<sup>145</sup>

## Brice's story

**Brice\* is a 43-year-old single father who had escaped a family violence situation with his mother when he was young. Brice had a history of alcohol and drug use, engagement with the criminal justice system and had struggled with aggression.**

After his first marriage ended he lost contact with his young son. He married again and had a son with his second wife, who was heavily dependent on drugs. He lived with his wife and son in social housing and often had to ask his mother for financial support.

Often when he came home from work, Brice found his son alone and with bruising that his wife couldn't explain. To prevent his wife from taking their son with her when she went to buy drugs at night, Brice began sleeping in the same room as his son. Brice desperately wanted to help his wife address her addiction, but couldn't seem to make a difference. Feeling he had done all he could to keep their family safely together, Brice took his son and moved in with his mother. He was later granted full custody of their son.

Even after leaving the situation with his ex-wife, she and her friends continued to threaten and harass him. Brice obtained a police order against his ex-wife, but that did not end the harassment. At this point, Brice felt he had few options left and decided to move interstate. Although he was now a great distance away, he still struggled and found it hard to find safe and secure accommodation for himself and his son.

After getting in touch with Mission Australia, Brice was able to secure transitional housing and gained access to mental health support and a range of other services including financial support. Brice was recently approved for a social housing property. Finally, after all they have been through, Brice and his son feel settled, safe and optimistic about the future.

\* Name changed to protect the identity of this person





## Service responses

### Overview of responses

There are a range of responses to domestic and family violence-driven homelessness:

<b>Preventing domestic and family violence</b>	Responses that seek to prevent domestic and family violence, in order to prevent both violence and any resulting homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Universal prevention initiatives that address structural issues including gender inequality.</li></ul>
<b>Responding to domestic and family violence</b>	Supporting the safety and recovery of those who have experienced domestic and family violence, by improving their wellbeing and material circumstances and preventing repeat violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Risk identification and early intervention trauma-informed integrated services</li><li>• Policing and justice responses</li><li>• Perpetrator interventions</li><li>• Supporting the families of victim-survivors</li></ul>
<b>Preventing homelessness</b>	Responses that seek to prevent or intervene early for people at risk of homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence, to ensure that homelessness either does not occur or is quickly resolved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rapid rehousing</li><li>• Safe at home programs</li><li>• Housing for men who use violence</li></ul>
<b>Responding to homelessness</b>	Supporting the safety and recovery of those who have become homeless as a result of domestic and family violence, to ensure that those who have experienced violence can access housing and other supports needed to break the cycle of homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Housing supports including social and affordable housing, private rental and crisis and transitional accommodation</li><li>• Non-housing supports including therapeutic interventions and financial security</li></ul>

### Preventing domestic and family violence

The best way of preventing homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence is to prevent the violence from occurring in the first place. Mission Australia supports a prevention and early intervention approach to domestic and family violence, both to reduce domestic and family violence itself as well as any resulting homelessness.

### Cultural and societal drivers of domestic and family violence

Higher levels of violence against women are driven by a range of cultural and societal factors, which include:<sup>146</sup>

- Condoning of violence against women

Levels of domestic and family violence are higher where societies, institutions, communities or individuals support or condone violence against women. Men who hold such beliefs are more likely to perpetrate violence against women, and both women and men who hold such beliefs are less likely to take action to support victim-survivors and hold perpetrators to account.

Violence against women is condoned both through widely-held beliefs and attitudes and through legal, institutional and organisational structures and practices that reflect and reinforce them.

- Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence

Violence is more common in families and relationships in which men control decision-making and less so in relationships in which women have a greater level of independence. Limits to women's independence or autonomy, whether through social factors such as unequal access to education and economic resources, or through men's limiting or control of women's financial or social independence in relationships, increase the probability of violence against women.

- Rigid gender roles and identities

Levels of violence against women are higher where there are more rigid distinctions between gender roles and between masculine and feminine identities. Further, men who hold traditional, hierarchical views about gender roles and relationships are more likely to perpetrate violence against women.

- Male peer relationships that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

If male peer relations are characterised by cultures that reinforce stereotypical and aggressive forms of masculinity, and/or the idea that relations between men and women are fundamentally based on conflict, this can create disrespect for, objectification of, or hostility towards women.

This makes cultural and systemic change a key part of reducing domestic and family violence.

Community attitudes are an important part of this context in shaping the way that individuals, organisations and communities respond to violence.<sup>147</sup> Data from the National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey<sup>148</sup> shows that most Australians have good knowledge about violence against women and do not endorse attitudes that support violence. However, around one in 20 Australians (5%) believe that violence against women may be justified in some circumstances, including if they make their partner look stupid or insult him in front of his friends, or if they try to end their relationship.<sup>149</sup>

People are less likely to recognise non-physical forms of abuse as violence. For example, 97% of respondents identified slapping/pushing to cause harm or fear as a form of violence, compared with only 70% who identified trying to control their partner by denying them money.<sup>150</sup>

Of significant concern is the attitudes of young people aged 16-24. Despite some improvement in attitudes between the 2009 and 2013 surveys, young people are still more likely than those aged 35+ to have attitudes that support violence against women and less likely to support gender equality in decision-making in relationships. This is particularly the case among young men, who also show a lower level of understanding of violence against women than do young women.<sup>151</sup>

There is a need for education at an early age around domestic and family violence and gender equality as well as addressing community attitudes around gender and violence. The Youth Action and White Ribbon survey of young people's attitudes in 2014 concerningly found that less than half of young people got information about domestic and family violence at school and that young men were more likely than young women to agree with statements supporting gender stereotypes and attitudes supporting violence.<sup>152</sup>



### Addressing cultural and social drivers of domestic and family violence

Five key approaches have been identified to address the cultural and societal factors that drive or reinforce violence against women:

1. Challenge condoning of violence against women.
2. Promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships.
3. Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles.
4. Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, boys and girls.
5. Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.<sup>153</sup>

Techniques that have been shown to be effective in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children include the following:

#### Direct participation programs

Direct participation programs target individuals, people in relationships or groups to build knowledge and skills for healthy relationships, improve access to resources that will support healthy relationships, improve social connections to networks and institutions, and support people to prevent or address other factors linked to violence against women, including child abuse.

In Australia, the 'LOVE BiTES' and 'Respectful Relationships' programs in schools have been found to improve attitudes of both boys and girls towards domestic violence.<sup>154</sup> Ensuring education programs address cultural contexts and environments is important to addressing issues of violence in a range of communities and geographies. Respectful relationships programs should also be available to young people who have disengaged from school. Where young people are recognised as at higher risk of perpetrating domestic and family violence, more targeted and intensive interventions are required.

## High School Programs in Western NSW

### LOVE BiTES

Each year, Mission Australia joins interagency partners to deliver the LOVE BiTES Respectful Relationships Education Program to all Year 10 students in Broken Hill. From 2018, services involved in delivery of Year 10 LOVE BiTES also worked together to deliver LOVE BiTES Junior which was rolled out to Year 8 students. The need for earlier intervention was identified as services and schools were seeing an increase in risk taking behaviour and unhealthy relationships in younger adolescents.

### Project You

Mission Australia also recently coordinated the delivery of Bravehearts' Project You! to local high school students in Broken Hill and Menindee. Project You! is an early intervention and prevention program that focusses on addressing personal safety and respectful relationship issues for young people. Mission Australia partnered with Bravehearts, the Integrated Violence Prevention Response Services (NSW Health) and schools for the delivery of Project You!. Feedback from both schools was overwhelmingly positive and the programs will be delivered again in coming years.

### Shark Cage®

The Shark Cage® is a practical framework for addressing vulnerability and re-victimisation in women who are victim-survivors of sexual and

domestic and family violence. Shark Cage® gives clients the knowledge and tools to feel empowered and actively decrease the likelihood of further victimisation.

Mission Australia arranged for Shark Cage® training to be delivered in Nyngan NSW for organisations and community members. Following the training, a workshop was held with Year 8 girls from Nyngan High School. The girls completed a range of activities focussing on identifying dangerous relationships and understanding their rights which they found very beneficial.





## Community mobilisation and strengthening

This includes programs and initiatives that support communities to address violence against women and children and the social norms that make it acceptable.<sup>155</sup>

### **Coonamble/Coonabarabran Domestic Violence Committee – Western NSW**

Mission Australia staff have worked with a range of other organisations to re-establish Domestic Violence (DV) Committees in Coonamble and Coonabarabran. Mission Australia has taken the lead in these committees with staff nominating themselves to be Chairperson and Secretary and the re-established committees have become an important part of the community.

The Coonamble DV Collective planned a Domestic Violence Walk. This involved the local football team which is sponsored by “Let’s tackle Domestic Violence”. They have also held a White Ribbon stall in the main street which provided information on domestic and family violence and encouraged local men from the community to take the White Ribbon pledge and have their photo taken, making a public stand against domestic and family violence in Coonamble.

The Coonabarabran Domestic Violence committee has facilitated the LOVE BiTES program for local high schools as well as hosting a Domestic Violence Forum open to the whole community. The Coonabarabran DV Committee also worked with the high school to plan a White Ribbon Assembly involving a number of men from the community taking the pledge alongside all students.

### **Goulburn – NSW**

Mission Australia has taken the lead in organising a community walk for White Ribbon Day over the last three years. More than 500 people attend including school students and local businesses, all taking a stand against domestic and family violence. The opportunity is also used to raise awareness of support services available. Presentations on domestic and family violence are also given to all high schools across Goulburn and Crookwell about domestic and family violence leading up to White Ribbon day as well as speaking at community events and to community groups.

Schools and local businesses also displayed signs stating ‘Goulburn says NO to domestic and family violence’. In one instance a woman reported that seeing the sign made her feel able to share her experience of domestic and family violence as there was community support.

### **Pilbara – WA**

In Tom Price in the Pilbara, the community united to take a stand against domestic and family violence at several events to mark the national day of awareness, White Ribbon Day. This included 120 residents marching through town, a sausage sizzle and children’s activities and yarn bombing several benches purple in memory of domestic and family violence victim-survivors. Various organisations, including Mission Australia, were involved in an effort to raise awareness of what domestic and family violence can do to whole communities and families.





### Organisational development

Organisations and their cultures can play a powerful role in influencing individual and group behaviours, and can help to prevent domestic and family violence by modelling respectful and healthy gender relations. This can include whole-of-school programs that engage students, teachers, staff, parents and community in efforts to create gender equality and prevent violence, and organisational auditing processes and that identify and address structures and practices that contribute to gender inequality and violence.<sup>156</sup>

Churches and faith-based groups can also play a role by providing moral guidance and setting appropriate standards of behaviour. Faith-based organisations should encourage respectful relationships and support victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in their community.<sup>157</sup>

### Communications and social marketing

Social marketing campaigns can be effective in changing attitudes, norms and behaviours, but only when they are sustained, use a range of platforms and are combined with direct participation or group education.<sup>158</sup>

### Civil society advocacy

Advocacy by civil society organisations has been essential for prompting policy development to prevent domestic and family violence. Promising advocacy techniques include skills training and capacity building for organisations and individuals advocating for gender equality and violence prevention, and leadership programs that identify and support individuals to promote gender equality and violence prevention.<sup>159</sup>

### **Addressing data gaps**

There are also aspects of domestic and family violence about which we need better information. Addressing data gaps is important for gaining the best possible information to support understanding and responding to domestic and family violence. These gaps include:

- Limitations in quantitative evidence on the prevalence and perpetration of violence.
- Lack of a consistent definition for family, domestic and sexual violence.
- Data fragmentation due to the number of agencies involved in responding to domestic and family violence.
- Limited information about specific at-risk groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrant groups including women on temporary visas and people with disabilities.
- Limited information about childhood experiences of family, domestic and sexual violence.
- Limited information about the characteristics of perpetrators, including information on socioeconomic status, mental health status, educational levels and location.
- Lack of information on outcomes for victim-survivors and perpetrators, including limited evaluation of prevention and intervention programs.<sup>160</sup>

Filling these gaps in our knowledge about domestic and family violence is a crucial step in improving policy and service responses to violence in our community.

## Supporting the safety and recovery of those experiencing domestic and family violence

For those who do experience domestic and family violence, a range of supports need to be put in place to promote their safety and recovery, ideally before they experience homelessness.

### First to know agencies

Women who are experiencing domestic and family violence often do not know where to go to seek help, which can cause vulnerable women and children to delay leaving home or seeking support.

A strong campaign targeting first-to-know agencies and the general public is needed so that information can be quickly to hand for women who need to leave home or seek support. Information should be widely available in first to know agencies such as hospitals, doctors' offices, childcare centres, schools, parenting programs and other places women are likely to visit. Access points to the domestic and family violence and homelessness service systems also need to be clear.

Health and other professionals need to be trained in identifying and appropriately responding to domestic and family violence.<sup>161</sup> Resources and training have been developed for some professionals in Australia to assist them to identify and support victim-survivors<sup>162</sup>. However, more can be done to develop procedures and training for staff in first-to-know agencies to ensure they are sufficiently informed and supported to take action.

## Facing Up to It – Clarence Plains, Tas

The Facing Up to It (FUTI) program aims to promote healthy relationships in Clarence Plains and provide community members with the knowledge and skills to recognise and tackle the sensitive issue of family violence. Objectives include to:

- Foster the development of healthy relationship skills across the community
- Facilitate the development of skills for effective response to disclosures of abuse
- Create a holistic community response to the issue of abusive relationships

- Increase community awareness through training, support and information on the possibilities of responding to this issue; and

- Take the issue of abusive relationships from the private to the public sphere

Mission Australia Housing (MAH) is an active FUTI committee member. MAH, as tenancy managers of 500 social homes in the Clarence Plains, has a strong role to play as a first-to-know agency.

More information about the program can be found here: <https://www.futi.org.au/>



### Integrated service delivery

Some of the women Mission Australia works alongside are not only experiencing domestic and family violence and risk of homelessness but are also dealing with associated issues of mental illness (including anxiety and depression) and substance misuse. Support is needed to deal with these co-occurring issues.

Multi-agency collaborations are needed to provide effective and accessible services to women and girls who have experienced domestic and family violence.<sup>163</sup> Currently, expertise exists across different service sectors (disability, family and domestic violence, etc.) and is not readily accessible to service workers.<sup>164</sup> Cross sectoral training packages and professional development placements or internships may be helpful in cross-pollinating knowledge from the various sectors.

A recent review of Australian integrated service provision in response to violence against women found that integrated responses are promising but that good data is limited due to a lack of high quality evaluations of relevant service models.<sup>165</sup>

Mission Australia believes that ensuring services that address complex and chronic needs are coordinated is important to an effective response to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. While organisations including Mission Australia attempt to use an integrated service model where possible within the constraints of government funding models, more integrated responses should be funded by governments and co-designed with service users.

More coordinated service delivery between specialised workers and services for women experiencing domestic and family violence such as counsellors, lawyers, financial counsellors, doctors, child support workers etc. would be beneficial. Better coordination between government departments including law enforcement, courts, community services, health, Centrelink and housing is also required to ensure a holistic response.

Given the complex issues that can be involved in relationships where domestic and family violence exists, designing and delivering programs and services to identify and support victim-survivors of domestic and family violence is essential. Co-locating medical and legal supports can minimise the number of contacts that women need to make.<sup>166</sup>

Providers funded under the Staying Home Leaving Violence program coordinate legal supports and service providers to assist women and their children to remain in the home and not be displaced by the offender. The service includes brokerage funds to increase home security, working with police and local courts to ensure the offender is removed, and assisting women to navigate legal, financial and tenancy issues.<sup>167</sup>

Timely support for those at risk of, or experiencing, domestic and family violence is also vital. The need to ensure early intervention, rapid response and lasting supports means a comprehensive strategy to address and prevent domestic and family violence will require financial investments in a range of effective programs. Tailored programs are also required, such as models suitable for women in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.<sup>168</sup>

For some women who experience homelessness caused by domestic and family violence, assistance needs to continue for some time after finding a new home, including trauma-informed support and rental assistance, until they can become fully independent. There can be real and significant risks to the lives of women leaving domestic and family violence<sup>169</sup> and flexibility is required around length of support.

Allocation of services, models and programs should be designed according to needs determined by local specialists, communities and agencies and based on evidence of best practice responses. This model should be underpinned by contracting and funding arrangements that allow for the enhanced



flexibility of service provision within local areas to meet the needs of women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

### Policing and justice responses

#### Adequate policing resources

Police play a critical role in immediate and ongoing responses to domestic and family violence, but because the violence often takes place in private, they rely on reporting to notify them of violent incidents. The majority of domestic violence incidents are not reported to police for reasons including:

- Fear of retribution and escalating violence.
- Fear of not being believed.
- Desire to protect the perpetrator.
- Fear of impacting the family (for example, through the removal of children).
- Economic dependence on the perpetrator.
- Privacy concerns.
- Fear of exposing the victim-survivor's own illegal activities.<sup>170</sup>

Reporting of domestic and family violence incidents has increased in recent years, which may be because of an increase in prevalence of domestic and family violence, changing community attitudes and awareness, or positive changes in police responses to domestic and family violence.

Given the emphasis on the importance of quick responses to reports of domestic and family violence, ensuring adequate resourcing to meet demand across regions and embedding domestic and family violence education for police are important parts of the police and justice response.

There is promising practice where police and community services organisations work together to address domestic and community violence.

## Family and Domestic Violence Response Team (FDVRT) – Geraldton WA

The Family and Domestic Violence Response Teams (FDVRT) established in Western Australia in 2013 are a joint initiative of WA Police, Department of Communities (Child Protection and Family Support) (CPFS) and various community service agencies with expertise in domestic and family violence. It is focused on keeping child and adult victim-survivors of domestic and family violence safe and ensuring risk management and accountability for perpetrators through an integrated systems response.

Mission Australia is the community service partner for the FDVRT in Geraldton, WA. A domestic and family violence worker from Mission Australia works in a team with a child protection worker and two police officers, to assess and triage all domestic and family violence reports that are made to police in the Murchison region, which spans from Exmouth in the north to Dongara in the south and Wiluna in the east. The collaborative arrangements allow for multiple perspectives and coordinated responses to domestic and family violence in Geraldton. Many of the situations investigated by the team involve other issues besides domestic and family violence, including alcohol and other drug use, mental health issues, and housing and homelessness, particularly given a large transient population. Referrals can be made by the team to services both for the victim-survivors of the violence, as well as the perpetrators. The model often works very successfully to provide an

integrated service, but can be compromised by long waiting lists and lack of available service infrastructure. Given the vast geographical area covered by the team, there is a strong need to develop and maintain effective networks with a range of appropriate support services in regional and remote communities.



### Legal support and resources

There is an essential role for Legal Aid and Community Legal Centres as those leaving domestic and family violence need immediate and affordable legal advice and support. It is important that adequate and sustainable funding is provided to community legal centres.

The court system also needs to understand the complexities and sensitivities of domestic and family violence. All agencies and workers in the justice system, including police, judicial officers, prosecutors, court staff, victim support workers and legal practitioners should be trained in and apply a trauma-informed approach to working with clients. There also needs to be sufficient interpreters available for court cases, such that separate interpreters for victim-survivors and perpetrators are available.<sup>171</sup>

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria) recommended more specialist family violence courts that are able to deal with criminal, civil and family law matters at the same time.<sup>172</sup> The development of specialist courts offers a more collaborative and more positively-perceived court environment for the resolution of legal cases.<sup>173</sup>

### Southport Domestic and Family Violence Court (Queensland)

A recent evaluation of the Southport Domestic and Family Violence Court found that courts users gave strongly positive assessments of the new model, and a range of positive outcomes including enhancing collaborations relationships between the court, domestic and family violence services, police and lawyers, improved perceptions of procedural fairness, and better understanding of court outcomes.





Further, where perpetrators are imprisoned, behaviour change programs should be provided prior to release and measures put in place to protect the victim-survivor's safety at the time of release.

### Approaches to services in regional, rural and remote areas

Hub-and-spoke models (where the agency is based in the 'hub' of the greatest population density and outreach services are provided over large geographical distances as 'spokes') have been found to be an effective model in providing domestic and family violence services in rural and regional areas.<sup>174</sup> When appropriately resourced with adequate levels of staffing and funding, services based on this model can support:

- The development of specialist knowledge about local dynamics of domestic and family violence.
- The employment of a specialist workforce.
- Planning and development for the long-term support and recovery of women, children and men.
- Flexibility and local participation, collaboration and community development.
- Local leadership to combat domestic and family violence.

These services seem to be effective because they are based in local community contexts. However, there is a risk that a lack of necessary resourcing can prevent them from focusing enough attention on the 'spokes' aspects of the model, and from meeting the diverse needs of the groups they need to service.

### Men's behaviour change programs

Men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) emerged in a number of countries, including Australia, in the late 1970s and early 1980s in recognition of the problem of violence against women.<sup>175</sup> Their intention is to reduce rates of recidivism and thus improve the safety and wellbeing of previous, current and future intimate partners. They may also contribute towards safer parenting and healthier childhoods.<sup>176</sup>

Historically, arguments against MCBPs include that they:

- Divert resources from victims' services;
- Reduce perpetrator accountability through the criminal justice system;
- Are ineffective;
- Are complex and expensive; and
- Contribute to the risk of violence by giving victims a false belief that violent behaviour will cease.

However, increasing support is being shown for perpetrator interventions including through *Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*, which contains stopping perpetrator violence and holding them to account as one of its outcome areas.

There are several different approaches to perpetrator programs, based on different theoretical understandings of what causes people to commit violence. Each of these has its proponents and critics, and there is a need to develop best practice evaluation principles and to evaluate specific programs to determine effectiveness across the spectrum of perpetrator interventions.<sup>177</sup>

A recent review of the Australian literature found mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of perpetrator programs.<sup>178</sup> In general, there is some early evidence that perpetrator programs can be effective, but limited research in Australia and internationally to support any one particular model.<sup>179</sup> The majority of such programs in Australia use a group work approach and are voluntary.

In 2015, Australian governments adopted a set of *National Outcomes Standards for Perpetrator Interventions*. These Standards help to guide the assessment of perpetrator interventions in Australia. The Headline Standards are:

- Women and their children's safety is the core priority of all perpetrator interventions.
- Perpetrators get the right interventions at the right time.
- Perpetrators face justice and legal consequences when they commit violence.
- Perpetrators participate in programs and services that enable them to change their violent behaviours and attitudes.
- Perpetrator interventions are driven by credible evidence to continuously improve.
- People working in perpetrator intervention systems are skilled in responding to the dynamics and impacts of domestic, family and sexual violence.<sup>180</sup>

Men's behaviour change programs should be funded in alignment with the Standards and further investment is needed in evaluation to determine which models of men's behaviour change programs are most effective. Perpetrator programs also require links and protocols with drug, alcohol and gambling services.<sup>181</sup>

Research has established that one of the most concerning problems with the service system in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia is the lack of services for perpetrators, outside of the police and court systems.<sup>182</sup> Mission Australia's experience in working in regional, rural and remote areas confirms this. Consultation with local communities in many areas of Australia has indicated that community members are concerned about the lack of options for dealing with perpetrators, including lack of temporary accommodation and men's behaviour change programs.

Adequate and appropriate perpetrator programs are required in all jurisdictions and tend to be lacking in regional and rural areas.

## Manin' Up Men's Behaviour Change Program – Western NSW

The primary outcome being sought is a reduction in domestic and family violence by those attending and completing the Manin' Up Men's Behaviour Change Program. This overarching goal is underpinned by a number of key strategies:

1. Application of contemporary evidence based practice in reducing re-offending including:
  - a. Matching the intensity of the intervention to the level of risk that a participant is assessed as having.
  - b. Targeting offending needs or dynamic risk factors which are known to contribute to domestic and family violence offending.
  - c. When dynamic risk factors are targeted appropriately, these risk factors can be altered positively.
  - d. Delivering the program using a cognitive behavioural and social learning approach which also accommodates the learning styles, capability and characteristics of program

## Caring Dads – Illawarra Shoalhaven Region NSW

Caring Dads is part of a pilot program being delivered in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region. Caring Dads is a parenting program for men who are perpetrators of domestic and family violence. Men are asked to reflect on the impact of domestic and family violence on children as a motivator

for change. Participation is voluntary and the program runs for 17 weeks. This program is in the initial phases of implementation and impact measurement data will be collected and analysed as the program progresses, however initial feedback from participants has been positive.





### Supporting the families of victim-survivors

In Mission Australia's experience, the immediate and extended families of victim-survivors often want to help their loved ones but don't know how to do so. Education programs are needed for family members, to help them understand how to support and understand the experience of domestic and family violence. A more integrated service system and more coordinated information and referrals from first-to-know agencies will also be of assistance to family members.

### Preventing and intervening early in homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence

There are two types of critical supports for victim-survivors who are at risk of homelessness due to domestic and family violence: affordable, safe and secure housing; and ongoing, individualised and flexible wraparound supports.<sup>183</sup> Where victim-survivors of domestic and family violence leave their home, they need support to access and maintain appropriate, affordable, safe and secure housing. This is particularly difficult for victim-survivors on low and moderate incomes, those who do not have social support networks and those facing other challenges in addition such as living with a mental illness or disability.

Mission Australia is a partner of the Everybody's Home campaign, which is calling on all governments to develop a national plan to end homelessness that:

- Addresses all the drivers of homelessness, including domestic and family violence.
- Rapidly rehouses people who become homeless and assists them to remain housed.
- Addresses the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the homelessness service system.
- Commits to ending homelessness by 2030.<sup>184</sup>

Mission Australia considers a range of interventions and programs as critical to preventing homelessness in cases of domestic and family violence. Some programs are being implemented to remove violent men from the home, enabling women and any children stay safely where they are connected to social networks, community support and schooling. This includes Safe at Home in Tasmania and Victoria and Staying Home Leaving Violence in New South Wales. In other cases, rapid rehousing can ensure that housing is sustained for those who need to leave a violent perpetrator.

Preventing homelessness resulting from domestic and family violence is not only critical to wellbeing, but also a cost-effective approach to supporting individuals and families experiencing or at risk of violence. Data analysed and published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicates that it is possible to make significant inroads into homelessness for women experiencing domestic and family violence through prevention approaches, with homelessness able to be prevented in nearly nine out of 10 cases of domestic violence:

The majority of clients who were housed on presentation did not become homeless with the support of homelessness services ... (including) women experiencing domestic violence (87%).<sup>185</sup>

Women whose housing was sustained – either by removing violent partners so they can stay in the family home or through rapid rehousing – received half the length of support (24 days on average) than if they became homeless (54 days on average). The average length of support for women who were homeless and were provided support to gain housing was 54 days – more than twice the 24 support days for women who maintained housing. Thus active support to maintain housing is not only effective in preventing homelessness, but is also a cost-effective measure.

## Rapid rehousing

Rapid rehousing is a model premised on a Housing First philosophy (that is, it privileges the rapid allocation of long-term housing over preparations to make individuals 'housing ready'). It is primarily intended for people who have maintained tenancies in the past and works with them to secure new tenancies, usually in the private rental market.<sup>186</sup> Research from the US has indicated that preventing families from entering crisis accommodation and instead providing them with immediate long-term housing with low-intensity support is an effective and cost-effective way of addressing their needs.<sup>187</sup>

Rapid rehousing is a well-established service response to homelessness in Australia and key features of rapid rehousing programs generally include that they:

1. Are targeted: programs are targeted to households that have recently become homeless and have been able to maintain a tenancy in the past.
2. Are fast: rehousing is fast but may not be immediate, depending on housing availability in the local market.
3. Secure housing: assists households to find housing by building relationships, negotiating with and incentivising landlords, e.g. through increased bonds and guaranteed rent repayment.
4. Include the provision of rent subsidies: flexible rent subsidies to keep the property affordable for the households.
5. Provide assistance to retain the home: time-limited tenancy support to give household members an opportunity to address their needs, including establishing links to mainstream agencies.<sup>188</sup>

The ability to provide rapid rehousing hinges on the capacity to quickly assess clients after becoming homeless as to whether a rapid rehousing process is appropriate and feasible and develop a rehousing plan. This is reliant on being able to readily source appropriate accommodation and the client having relatively low-level needs that can be met with the provision of housing and some low-level support.<sup>189</sup>

Mission Australia believes that rapid rehousing is mostly an appropriate service response for women and children escaping domestic and family violence, who are often well able to maintain a tenancy once the threat of violence has been removed.

## Macarthur Real Estate Engagement Project (MREEP), NSW

The Early Intervention and Tenancy Support Service team in South West Sydney currently leads this Project, working with Real Estate Agents and multiple services in health, housing, employment and Centrelink. Supporting tenants who are struggling to maintain their tenancies, MREEP provides early intervention for new and existing tenants of Real Estates to avoid them entering homelessness. Flexible appointments, wraparound supports (financial planning/budget, setting goals, free health checks), and a person-centred approach and support to build positive relationships with Real Estate Agents and enables tenants to gain confidence to access services, activities and community events. Outcomes so far have included 138 tenants (including their families) have exited social housing and secured private rent, with 170 tenants having avoided eviction.



### Safe at home programs

Safe at Home programs aim to allow women to stay in the family home while the perpetrator of violence is removed. This is based on two social justice principles: that perpetrators should be held accountable for their actions, and that it is unjust for women to be forced to leave their home in order to leave the violence.<sup>190</sup>

Although Safe at Home programs were never intended to be a universal response, they are now sufficiently well-established that they can be considered a viable alternative for women who leave a violent partner. This includes Safe at Home in Tasmania and Victoria and Staying Home Leaving Violence in New South Wales. While these programs cannot replace specialist homelessness services and forms of refuge/crisis accommodation, they should be considered one of a suite of possible interventions that may be appropriate for some women to choose.<sup>191</sup>

Across Australia there is no shared agreement of what constitutes a Safe at Home program or initiative, which makes identifying good practice difficult.<sup>192</sup> There are, however, a number of common elements among such programs, including:

- Case management with a goal of assisting women to remain in independent housing in their own home or home of their choice.
- Safety planning and risk assessment protocols.
- Protections orders and ouster/exclusion provisions.
- Brokerage funds for security upgrades.
- Strategies to enhance economic security.



- Support and advocacy on behalf of clients with agencies involved in integrated service provision.
- Capacity building of local interagency partners to facilitate a coordinated response.

There are also four conceptual pillars which underlie safe at home programs:

- Focus on maximising women's safety.
- Coordinated/integrated response involving partnerships between local agencies.
- Safe at Home as a homelessness prevention strategy.
- Importance of enhancing women's economic security.

Safe at Home programs are a program model worth expanding in all States and Territories. Further work could also be done to remove the onus on women to leave the violence, including providing safe and therapeutic spaces for men to go when angry or under the influence of alcohol and at risk of committing violence.

## Staying Home Leaving Violence - NSW

The Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) service model is based on intensive case work which is long-term, needs-based and integrated with key agencies such as the Police, Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services, health services, Housing NSW and relevant NGOs. SHLV includes a process of careful safety planning, implementation of safety modifications, the provision of safety equipment within a victim's home and the provision of Duress Alarm devices where appropriate and available. Clients (victims separated from the abuser) assessed as very high risk with little prospects of remaining safe within their own home are informed of the results of the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT). SHLV will provide such women with options for keeping safe, including options for relocating to safer accommodation. If women in this situation continue to make the informed choice to remain in their home, they will continue to be supported by SHLV, following careful assessment and consideration of worker safety.



### Housing for men who use violence

There is general agreement that if anyone is to leave the home when domestic and family violence has occurred it should be the perpetrator rather than the victim-survivor, however this is not always safe and practical in present circumstances and a shift in thinking is required. A shift in practice also relies on the availability of accommodation options for men.<sup>193</sup>

Homelessness increases the risk of domestic and family violence perpetrators reoffending. Offenders without a home are less likely to engage with support services, more likely to be isolated, may be permitted to return to the home by the victim-survivor or be more difficult to track down by the police. Currently where men are attempting to manage their risk of reoffending, there is a shortage of both short-term and long-term accommodation that they can access.

Providing housing for men who use violence enables them to engage with services to address their issues and reduce the risk of future offending. This includes both crisis and longer term affordable housing options. Emergency accommodation services for men could be re-oriented to provide for more easy removal of perpetrators from the family home to a place where they can engage with men's domestic violence services.<sup>194</sup>

More accommodation options for men reduces the burden on women to leave the family home when violence occurs. However, more accommodation options for men should only be considered in addition to the necessary housing supports required for women and children escaping domestic and family violence and not through any transfer of funds from much needed women's services.

### The Communicare Breathing Space program - WA

The Communicare Breathing Space program in Western Australia is a therapeutic community that provides men who have been abusive in their intimate partner or family relationships with approximately three months of accommodation while they undertake an intensive therapeutic program including group work, individual counselling and case management in their behaviour change journey. This linking of accommodation and behaviour change is a promising model for future practice.







## Paul's story

**Paul\* is an Aboriginal young person who was referred to Supervised Community Accommodation Townsville (SCAT) after his first offence – a domestic violence matter involving his mother and sister. Paul's initial assessment identified that he was at risk of homelessness due to his long-term, threatening and abusive behaviour towards his female family members. As part of his case plan process, Paul and his family identified that SCAT was the most appropriate housing service for him.**

SCAT team members worked with Paul to identify his goals and develop strategies to achieve them. These included training in life skills; appropriate, non-violent, respectful, culturally appropriate relationships between male and females; anger management techniques; and communication skills.

With the right support, Paul was able to develop strong relationships at the local PCYC boxing program, connect with Aboriginal mentors, and become involved in billycart building and other local community initiatives. Over the course of the six-month program, Paul's confidence grew rapidly. He began speaking to female staff, and then respectfully engaging with the females in his family. During his stay at SCAT, Paul also took part in the first Cultural Camp run by Mission Australia and ATSILS.

Following this process, Paul has not re-offended, his relationships with his family members continue to improve, and he continues to have a strong relationship with three of the camp volunteers. He has highlighted his cultural and spiritual needs with these volunteer mentors, and has re-established connections with elders from his family.

\*Name changed to protect the identity of this person



## Supporting the safety and recovery of those made homeless by domestic and family violence.

### Housing Supports

#### Adequate supply of social and affordable housing

Housing First or rapid rehousing responses discussed above are reliant on an adequate supply of social and affordable housing. However, there is currently a problematic shortage of accommodation options for individuals and families on low and moderate incomes experiencing or at risk of domestic and family violence and facing homelessness. There is an insufficient supply of social housing, a lack of affordable private rentals that are accessible to people escaping violence and insufficient support services to assist people to find and maintain a tenancy.

In 2017-18, among clients of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) who had experienced domestic and family violence: short-term or emergency accommodation was needed by 40% and received by 70% of those who needed it; long-term housing was needed by 30% or over 36,600 with only 4% receiving this service. Almost three in four daily unassisted requests included a need for some type of accommodation support (74%). This was usually because there was no accommodation available at the time revealing a significant unmet housing need for people experiencing domestic and family violence, particularly for those who are seeking long-term housing.<sup>195</sup>

Social housing is increasingly difficult to secure and demand exceeds supply in all States and Territories resulting in long waiting lists for those who need a home. Australia is projected to need another 500,000 social and affordable dwellings by 2026 in order to meet affordable housing needs.

As a strong supporter and partner of the Everybody's Home campaign, Mission Australia calls on the Federal Government to develop a coherent National Housing Strategy that includes the development of 300,000 new social housing properties and 200,000 new affordable housing properties.<sup>196</sup> Such a strategy should determine the respective roles of federal, state and local governments in supporting the development of the needed housing stock, and identify the appropriate policy, financial and institutional instruments required to achieve the target.

#### Simplifying housing assistance application processes

There is a need to simplify application processes through housing authorities for women who are in crisis situations. Those who are leaving home, particularly with children, and under crisis conditions, should have access to streamlined application processes to reduce the amount of time and documentation required to access housing. Processes should also be updated so that they do not need to return quickly or regularly to re-establish their circumstances with the housing authority.

While there have been positive initiatives to simplify housing assistance application processes in some States and Territories, a number of barriers still prevent or impede access to housing assistance including: the volume and type of documentation required to apply for social housing assistance; the requirements to keep information up-to-date to maintain a position on State housing registers; and the complexity of websites and information leading to confusion. State and Territory Governments should simplify and better communicate the social housing application documentation and processes, especially those relating to eligibility for priority housing.

### Private rental accommodation

More can also be done to increase private rental affordability for people on low and moderate incomes through inclusionary zoning, increasing Commonwealth Rent Assistance and the provision of rental subsidies as required.

Anglicare's *Rental Affordability Snapshot 2018* found that only a tiny proportion of properties were appropriate and affordable for the single parent household types considered. This included a single parent household with two children (one aged less than five and one aged less than 10) receiving the Parenting Payment Single (0.79%); a single parent with one child (aged less than five) receiving the Parenting Payment Single (1.05%) and a single parent household with one child (aged over eight) receiving Newstart Allowance (0.27%).<sup>197</sup> In 2015-16, there were 89,700 single mother households, across Australia, living in rental stress. Of single mother households who rent, over 50% earned less than \$41,600 per annum.<sup>198</sup>

Tenancy law reform is also required to enable victim-survivors of domestic and family violence to leave tenancies without further liability and with protection against being listed on tenancy databases (blacklisting). Some, but not all States and Territories have made recent progress on this front and these protections should be universally accessible.

### Crisis and transitional housing

An adequate supply of crisis and transitional housing is required in addition to affordable long-term housing and a range of options are needed for different cohorts including women with children, men with children and people with co-occurring alcohol and drug dependence.

## Bega crisis accommodation

As part of our specialist homelessness support services across Cooma and Bega, Mission Australia delivers the after-hours domestic and family violence response. We have a crisis accommodation facility consisting of four rooms for women and children escaping domestic and family violence where they can reside with us for up to three months with intensive supports by our qualified staff.



There is growing support for accommodation options that provide independent, private accommodation and on-site support, rather than communal refuges with shared facilities. The 'core and cluster' model is a set of individual accommodation units with their own facilities in a single location, with on-site office space for workers and communal areas for residents. This model gives women and children greater privacy than the older-style communal refuge model that is still more prevalent in most areas of Australia.

In Victoria, as part of the Family Violence Housing Blitz implemented following the Royal Commission into Family Violence, all communal-style family violence refuges are being upgraded to 'core and cluster' models by the end of 2020.<sup>199</sup> In NSW, the 'core and cluster' model has been used to develop new facilities in Brewarrina, Bourke and Wilcannia, with another to be established in Orange under the NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023, with further expansion planned following evaluation.<sup>200</sup>

Mission Australia's experience of operating the Brewarrina cluster-style service is that it works well for the women and children who stay there. Two crisis accommodation units are designed to provide immediate access to accommodation for women in crisis, and two transitional units have three-month leases with a community housing provider. During their stay, Mission Australia staff work with women and children intensively on independent living skills, support programs, finding longer-term accommodation and meeting the individual needs of the families who stay there.

State and Territory governments should provide additional funding for the provision of cluster-style accommodation options and also provide funding to convert communal refuge accommodation for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence to cluster-style accommodation, providing greater privacy and opportunities for individualised service responses to the families who use these facilities.

## Women's Safe Houses – Western NSW

Mission Australia runs three safe houses located in Western New South Wales, at Lightning Ridge, Walgett and Brewarrina. These Safe Houses operate as crisis centres and assist women and children escaping domestic and family violence and homelessness with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Transitional accommodation assists women and families who have been through the Safe House program and cannot return home. While a woman or family is living in transitional housing, staff assist them with living skills programs, financial stability, tenancy supports,

children's educational engagement, liaising with health providers and progressing into more permanent stable housing. Group-based parenting and behavioural programs are also offered such as Seasons for Healing, Aboriginal Triple P, Incredible Years, Circle of Security, 123 Magic, Keeping Children Safe, LOVE BiTES, Through Young Black Eyes, Rage (Anger Management), Managing the Bull and Act Now Stronger Together. Community outreach including intensive case management is provided for clients in the community with complex needs.





## Judy's Story

**Judy\* is an Aboriginal woman with four children aged between 10 months and nine years. When she was 29, Judy and the children moved to Walgett after experiencing violence from her partner. Judy and the children were living in private rental accommodation but were forced to leave when it became a health hazard due to the poor condition it was in. She wanted to stay in Walgett where she had a lot of family support but couldn't find any housing options. Before long, she and her children were forced into homelessness.**

Judy reached out to Mission Australia's Walgett Specialist Homelessness Service. The family was initially provided short-term accommodation in the women's refuge, and Judy was supported with case management and counselling to address her anxiety and declining mental health.

Judy continued to search for private rental accommodation but was unable to find anything appropriate and affordable. Support workers helped her to apply for priority housing, although the wait list for a suitable home was extremely lengthy. Not knowing when a house would become available added to the uncertainty and anxiety of their situation.

Judy wanted to do everything she could to find accommodation, and completed budgeting and tenancy preparation programs while at the refuge.

Today, things are looking up for Judy and her children. She has maintained a lease for more than 12 months, is working at the local preschool and studying to further her education. Despite all that she has been through, she now feels at peace and is filled with hope for the future.

\*Name changed to protect the identity of this person



### Non-housing supports

A significant majority (76% or 91,500) of clients of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in 2017-18 who had experienced domestic or family violence identified needing specific assistance for the violence and 87% of those who identified this service need received it.<sup>201</sup> Such support can include therapeutic discussion or group sessions, counselling, and specialised domestic and family violence support services

Aside from housing, other commonly needed services for SHS clients who had experienced domestic and family violence were:

- Advice/information (75% or over 90,900), with 99% receiving this service.
- Advocacy/liaison (55% or over 66,800), with 97% receiving this service.
- Material aid/brokerage (38% or over 45,700), with 88% receiving this service.

Through our experience delivering domestic and family violence and homelessness services we have found that a range of supports are necessary to respond to the immediate needs of victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

The need for brokerage funding to pay for appliances and furniture when leaving a violent relationship is a vital support for many women. Links to employment programs to increase financial security are also beneficial. Further, for women who are not leaving the relationship supports can be extremely difficult to access and more should be done to provide appropriate supports in these situations.

### Therapeutic interventions

Therapeutic interventions are necessary, both for adult victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and their children. Building and maintaining strong developmental pathways after or during an experience of violence is critical to ensure ongoing physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Providing counselling to children who have been exposed to or involved in domestic or family violence is an important response to prevent the intergenerational transmission of violence and other negative outcomes. Children can be subject to ongoing violence through custody contact with their father – whether through abuse to themselves or hearing their father talk about or interact with their mother.<sup>202</sup>

Therapeutic support for parents (usually mothers) who have been the victim-survivor of domestic and family violence is also critical in order to maintain a positive relationship with their children, which can be negatively affected by the children's experience of violence.<sup>203</sup>

It is also necessary to take a trauma-informed approach to working with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. This means that workers across all agencies and service systems that interact with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence need to apply a trauma-informed approach to working with clients, including:

- Emphasising physical, psychological, and emotional safety for victim-survivors and workers.
- Creating opportunities for victim-survivors to build a sense of control and empowerment.
- Acknowledging that victim-survivors often live in fear of ongoing threats and violence.
- Recognising that different forms of violence may co-occur, may be hidden and may not have been appropriately acknowledged or addressed.
- Providing a culturally competent and safe response.
- Understanding that trauma profoundly affects the thoughts, beliefs and behaviours of victim-survivors.<sup>204</sup>



## Jane's story

**Jane\* is an older woman from a culturally and linguistically diverse background who left a domestic and family violence relationship of 12 years. In addition to being physically violent, Jane's ex-partner prevented her from obtaining employment and was always suspicious of who she was with and who she was contacting.**

Afraid and unsure of where to go for help, Jane went to the local hospital. The hospital referred her to two women's shelters where she stayed before going to Yaralla Cottages – a transitional housing program supported by Mission Australia. Yaralla Cottages comprises 24 one-bedroom units and caters for single women aged over 35 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Women typically stay for six months, or until they can be supported into longer-term housing.

After being diagnosed with depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and other medical

conditions, Jane was referred to Victims Services NSW for counselling to begin processing what she had been through. She also attended After the Storm – a program designed for women who have escaped domestic and family violence situations – and a parenting course. Jane's 10-year-old son is in foster care and she sees him one weekend a month.

Jane is currently enrolled in a TAFE-accredited outreach course designed to help people to determine career pathways. This is a big step for Jane who was only previously able to undertake three shifts of a cleaning job throughout the year due to her ex-partner's behaviour.

Mission Australia is providing Jane with ongoing support to obtain long-term housing and advocating for her to be granted priority housing in an area close to her support service and counsellor. Jane is also working towards regaining custody of her son.

\*Name changed to protect the identity of this person





## Financial security

Perpetrators of domestic and family violence can use financial or economic abuse as means of control. This can include preventing or interfering with participation in education, training or employment, or with the acquisition and use of economic resources. Even when economic abuse is not directly applied, other forms of domestic and family violence can result in economic harm and financial disadvantage for victims. This influences victim-survivors' ability to escape violence, and to recover and rebuild after experiences of violence.<sup>205 206</sup>

Women from all socioeconomic backgrounds can be the victim-survivors of financial or economic abuse, but women with disabilities and older women can experience additional challenges.<sup>207</sup>

The impacts of economic abuse can be severe,<sup>208</sup> and can lead to long-term issues such as poor credit records and erosion of the victim-survivor's sense of financial capacity. It is often perpetrated post-separation, extending the experience of abuse. It can impact on children's wellbeing, resulting in material deprivation and social exclusion. Further, it can impact on a victim-survivor's decision to stay in violent relationships, as they are forced to 'choose' between poverty and violence. Economic abuse is a major reason why women stay in or return to violent relationships, particularly where there is inadequate social security support.

Economic abuse particularly contributes to housing insecurity.<sup>209</sup> Housing is the major household cost for most people and in some cases a source of wealth that can be lost when women leave a violent relationship.

A range of initiatives to assist women with housing are needed, with options to either relocate or stay at home (with the perpetrator excluded).<sup>210</sup> Both staying at home and relocating for safety are expensive: when women are able to stay in the home, they need to cover the cost of housing that in many cases two people were previously paying for; relocating to a new home also carries large financial implications.<sup>211</sup> The cost to a woman of leaving a violent relationship is estimated at \$18,000, not including the loss of two weeks' pay.<sup>212</sup>

When a victim-survivor of violence tries to leave a violent partner, immediate, practical help is required. Crisis payments available from Centrelink may be necessary, but are often inadequate to meet immediate needs. Schemes to provide bond payments and the first few weeks of rent in advance are useful, but are not available in all parts of Australia and they can be difficult to access. Legislative or policy interventions are also needed to address issues in relation to credit history, proof of residential addresses and other similar requirements when accessing housing in the private rental market. Increasingly employers are offering domestic and family violence leave, as Mission Australia does for its own workforce.

Recent research has found four broad areas in which the economic injustice resulting from violence should be addressed:

1. Preventing the economic loss associated with violence, including improving women's economic status, early specialist advice and assistance to secure property and finances, and to prevent loss upon separation, improving interactions with Centrelink, and preventing loss through employment.
2. Meeting women's basic living needs and economic security in the crisis period and beyond, including improving secure housing options, and ensuring adequate levels of income support and responses from Centrelink.
3. Redressing economic injustice associated with violence, including improving Family Court outcomes and access to legal representation and support, and providing specialist domestic and family violence skills for financial counsellors.
4. Promoting women's future earning and economic wellbeing, including ensuring access to affordable housing, and education, training and employment options and supports.<sup>213</sup>

Access to social security payments through Centrelink can be particularly important in providing a source of income for women. Access to social security payments are an important part of addressing domestic and family violence in two ways:

1. Supporting women in being able to leave violent relationships, and
2. Enabling them to re-establish themselves and rebuild their lives.<sup>214</sup>

As set out above, some women will not be eligible for social security, including women on temporary visas and asylum seekers. Even for those who are eligible, social security income is often too low to secure safe accommodation. Finding and maintaining a home on a single social security payment may not be possible, forcing victim-survivors to return to violent relationships.

Further, establishing social security entitlement becomes too difficult: It can be difficult for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence to establish their eligibility for social security payments, including dealing with the administration required following a relationship breakdown.<sup>215</sup>

Given the reliance of many victim-survivors of domestic and family violence on income support, improving interactions between people who have experienced domestic and family violence and Centrelink is a critical part of addressing economic and therefore housing security. The safety net must be accessible when people most need it.

Increasing rates of payment including Newstart and Commonwealth Rent Assistance are also extremely important in preventing and responding to homelessness resulting from domestic and family violence so that victim-survivors and their children can find and maintain a home. This is an important corollary to improving the supply of social and affordable housing and the Commonwealth should focus on both demand and supply of affordable housing for those on the lowest incomes in order to prevent and address homelessness.

## Mary's story

**Mary\* was a 34-year-old mother of six and four months pregnant with her seventh child when she was referred to Lightning Ridge Crisis Centre through the Aboriginal Legal Service in Walgett.**

Mary and her children were homeless – living in an unsuitable and inadequate dwelling – because of ongoing domestic and family violence and substance misuse issues with her ex-partner. Mission Australia offered Mary and her children crisis accommodation until she was able to attain more permanent housing.

Mary was already familiar with the service staff because of several serious domestic and family violence incidents in the past. As the case worker had already developed and maintained rapport with Mary and the children, she opened up about her issues and needs including: housing assistance, financial support, counselling and independent living skills.

Mary was not financially independent and did not know how to budget. Previously, her ex-partner would use all their money on drugs, leaving her

struggling to feed the children. The case worker informed Mary this was financial abuse – a form of domestic and family violence. The worker supported Mary to attain a crisis payment through Centrelink and to develop an Individual Support Plan. She attended a budgeting program and took part in a cooking program where nutritional, economical meals are planned and cooked for the week.

After much encouragement from police that making a statement against her ex-partner would be in her family's best interests, Mary requested the support of her case worker and made a statement. She had previously been too scared of the potential repercussions and did not trust police. Subsequently, a warrant was put out for her ex-partner's arrest.

Mary now feels like there is "light at the end of the tunnel". She feels that with ongoing support from Mission Australia she will eventually be able to live independently and recover a sense of stability and safety for herself and her children.

\*Name changed to protect the identity of this person





# Policy recommendations:

## 1 Prevent, reduce and eliminate domestic and family violence

All levels of government should fund specific primary prevention strategies that aim to prevent family and domestic violence from occurring in the first place, by addressing the underlying drivers of this violence in order to prevent both violence and any resulting homelessness. This includes:

- a) Addressing social and cultural drivers through direct education programs on domestic and family violence and gender equality as a priority in all schools and for groups at heightened risk of domestic and family violence.
- b) Promoting and strengthening positive equal and respectful relationships between and among women and men, girls and boys.
- c) Addressing community attitudes around rigid gender roles and challenging the condoning of violence through programs at an organisational and community level and through social marketing and civil society advocacy.
- d) Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life including promoting women's independence and decision-making in relationships and more broadly.

## 2 Respond well to domestic and family violence so that homelessness and other negative outcomes are minimised

It is important that the safety, recovery and wellbeing of those who have experienced domestic and family violence is supported and repeat violence is prevented through integrated services.

a) State and Territory governments should implement flexible, placed-based responses to domestic and family violence that are designed according to local needs and underpinned by contracting and funding arrangements that allow for flexible service provision within local areas and corresponding impact measurement.

b) Funding should also allow police, legal services and community services to operate in a coordinated way.

c) Domestic and family violence services need to be funded by all levels of government to meet the needs of the following cohorts and co-designed with these groups to ensure appropriateness for:

- Children
- Young people
- People living in rural, regional and remote areas
- People with disability
- Culturally and linguistically diverse women, particularly those on temporary visas
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- Older women
- LGBTI people
- Men

d) Adequate policing and legal resources are required to provide quick responses and meet demand. Police, Magistrates, interpreters and others in the justice system also need training to understand the complexities and sensitivities of domestic and family violence and take a trauma-informed approach.

e) Staff and workers who are likely to be the first-to-know of domestic and family violence should be provided with training and information to ensure they are able to support women and children at risk of or



disclosing domestic and family violence and/or homelessness. This includes client-facing staff in hospitals, schools, early childhood education and parenting programs.

f) Perpetrator interventions should be incorporated as part of an integrated response and continually evaluated to ensure effectiveness in preventing future violence.

### **3 Prevent homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence**

Responses that seek to prevent or intervene early when homelessness does occur as a result of domestic and family violence are essential to ensure that homelessness either does not occur or is quickly resolved. To achieve this:

a) State and Territory governments should fund rapid rehousing options through a housing first model for victim-survivors who cannot or choose not to stay at home.

b) State and Territory governments should expand Safe at Home programs to enable women experiencing domestic and family violence and their children to remain safely in their home if that is their choice.

c) State and Territory governments should provide additional funding for accommodation options for men who use violence to enable women to more safely stay in their home. This is in addition to requisite funding for women's accommodation.

### **4 Respond well to homelessness with housing that gives victim-survivors the choice to stay or leave and non-housing supports as needed**

Supporting the safety and recovery of those who have become homeless as a result of domestic and family violence is vital to ensure that those who have experienced violence can access housing and other supports needed to break the cycle of homelessness:

a) The Commonwealth Government adopt the proposals put forward by the Everybody's Home campaign including support for the development of 500,000 social and affordable homes, providing relief for Australians in chronic rental stress by increasing Commonwealth Rent Assistance and developing a plan to end homelessness by 2030.

b) Crisis and transitional housing should be funded at levels that meet demand and appropriate models implemented for women leaving domestic and family violence such as the core and cluster model.

c) Therapeutic interventions should be funded for both adult and child victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and a trauma-informed approach taken by workers across all agencies and service systems that interact with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

d) The Commonwealth Government should ensure adequate income support to people experiencing domestic and family violence to enable them to live safely including single mothers and refugees and simplify access to income support for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, including crisis payments.



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