

**The role of specialist women's services
in Australia's response to violence against women and their children
Policy Brief : 7 April 2016**

Summary

Australian governments, ministers and community leaders are voicing stronger commitments than ever before to ending violence against women and their children. But while more and more women are recognising themselves as victims/survivors of violence and seeking help, there is no guarantee that when they come forward they and their families will receive the knowledgeable, competent support they need.

That support is best provided by specialist women's services. These services know how to plan for safety and assess complex and changing risks; they advocate for and with victims/survivors and support them to navigate complex systems; they understand the dynamics of violence and the impacts of trauma; and they use principles of empowerment and client-centred approaches to support women and their children to recover from the impacts of violence and trauma. These services have led prevention efforts and created men's behaviour change programs that have women's and children's safety at their core. Specialist services contribute to social change using their on-the-ground knowledge of women's experiences.

Yet specialist services find themselves having to turn women and families away at alarming rates. The services at the heart of developing and delivering best practice responses are drastically underfunded despite increasing demand. Specialist services are leading best practice, but they often do not get the recognition and support they need. Short term, program based government funding does not match the complex nature of the work that is often required to support women and their families as well developing crucial early intervention and prevention work in local communities.

Specialist services have led the way for several decades; now funding systems have to change, to adequately and appropriately respond to violence as the widespread and entrenched social problem it is. For example, domestic and family violence services should not have to rely on short-term homelessness funding or juggling other small, short term funding streams to do their indispensable long-term work.

The message from the community is strengthening: If you care about ending violence against women and their children, you need to care about services. This means:

- Substantially increasing funding to key areas such as specialist domestic and family violence support services, domestic violence outreach services, women's refuges, sexual assault services, women's legal services, specialist women's court support services, community-controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and community based specialists working with LGBTIQ communities, women with disability and culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Recognising the central and leading expertise of specialist women's services and entrenching this role in all developing policies, practice and programs
- Creating a dedicated and recurrent funding stream through partnership between the Australian Government and the states and territories that supports the breadth of work specialist women's and children's family violence services do to respond to family violence, which is not adequately resourced or measured by homelessness funding
- Developing national standards for all services responding to violence against women and children, building on work already done, to strengthen services, continually develop best practice and guide grants and funding in the area. Standards development should be sector-driven and resourced by government.

Community-based specialist women's services are central to ending violence

It is a human rights obligation for governments to provide support services to women and children who have had violence inflicted upon them.¹ The Agreed Conclusions of the 57th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women emphasise that efforts to eliminate violence must include support services that empower victims and survivors.² UN Women guidelines state:

[W]hile the state should play an important role in establishing and funding services, it is not often the most appropriate body to run the services. Where possible, specialist crisis services responding to victims/survivors of violence against women should be run by independent and experienced women's non-governmental organizations providing gender-specific, empowering and comprehensive support to women survivors of violence, based on feminist principles.³

Women's organisations have been at the forefront of the effort to eliminate violence against women (VAW). They were the first to advocate for public awareness of VAW, introduce refuges and crisis centres, call for perpetrator accountability, challenge negative attitudes that condone and perpetuate VAW, and initiate prevention activities.⁴ Globally, women's organisations are recognised as being the single most important factor driving policy development to prevent and respond to violence against women and their children.⁵ On the converse, policies that adopt a "gender-neutral" treatment of violence and sideline women-specific services in favour of generalist agencies are counterproductive. This is in part because such policies ignore the reality that violence against women is systemic and both results from and contributes to gender inequality.⁶

The international and Australian evidence is clear that not just 'any old service' will do: ill-equipped services that lack well-trained staff discourage help-seeking, prevent disclosure of abuse and may inadvertently increase the risks for victims/survivors or lead them to return to abusive situations.⁷ Good service provision is underpinned by a gendered understanding of violence.⁸ It is focused on women's and children's safety⁹, provides gender and cultural safety, works from a client-centred, trauma-based, empowering framework¹⁰, supports women to navigate the complex systems, recognises children as clients in their own right, and works towards greater gender equality recognising the complexity of intersectionality and that women are best qualified to decide their pathway to recovery from violence and trauma.¹¹ As researcher and survivor Christine Craik explains in relation to family violence:

Women and children living with and leaving family violence need services that know the issues, that conduct a proper risk assessment, that don't further blame and hurt the victim and that don't absolve the perpetrator from responsibility.¹²

Specialist women's services contribute to better long and short-term outcomes for women and children who have lived with violence; they have a greater capacity to recognise and dismantle barriers, and to counteract negative social messages and myths that may deter or undermine women's disclosure of violence.¹³ Research in the United Kingdom has shown that women would often not have sought support for themselves and their children if services had been mainstream, as compared to specialist women's services.¹⁴ As a result of factors such as these, women-only and women-led services are widely acknowledged in international minimum support standards and frameworks.¹⁵

The critical role of specialist women's services in leading the primary prevention of violence against women and in promoting gender equality more broadly has also been highlighted in a number of studies.¹⁶ The work of women's services has included: gender equity training and workforce capacity-

building; best practice respectful relationships education in schools; partnership development; workplace and community-based programs (e.g. bystander training, financial literacy); media advocacy programs; evaluation and research; and dissemination of evidence.

The commitment and in-depth knowledge of women's organisations have not only been fundamental for creating diverse contexts and safe environments in which women feel able to name and discuss experiences of violence, but also in developing models of service provision.¹⁷ However, specialist women's services continue to receive inadequate recognition and funding, and are often excluded from policy development processes by both state/territory governments and the Australian Government. The systemic advocacy and policy development work done by specialist women's services is often not recognised and inadequately funded or unfunded, but is a critical underpinning of the development of a sound, evidence-based policy and service infrastructure.

Specialist women's and allied services against violence in Australia

In Australia, the specialist services whose main role is supporting women and children in situations of violence include: specialist domestic and family violence services, women's refuges/shelters, crisis support, early intervention, prevention and community education, services supporting survivors of sexual violence and rape crisis centres, outreach services, counselling services and hotlines, and self-help and mutual support groups, men's behaviour change programs and perpetrator intervention programs. Other services that work closely with these and often deal with issues of violence in their work, among other matters, include: women's and specialist legal services, women's health centres, women's counselling services, women's referral and information services, women's housing programs, migrant and refugee women's centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's services and groups, neighbourhood centres, family support centres and working women's centres. Community-led services are particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, who may not feel safe or supported in "mainstream" services and who might otherwise not access support.¹⁸

Specialist women's services take a variety of organisational forms. Many grew out of small, autonomous grass-roots women's organisations, which were typically volunteer-based and often used collective models of decision-making. Almost all services have now shifted to a more formal governance board/management structure and deliver services under contract to government funding bodies. In recent years, larger community service organisations providing a range of services to different groups have increasingly taken on auspice roles to incorporate the work of existing women's services, which often continue with a degree of their own former autonomy and identity. In some cases, such larger generalist providers have developed their own violence-related services and gained the support of government funding. There is also a growing number of new non-government, community and privately-funded organisations and initiatives operating in the area. There is a need to monitor and assess the changing nature of funding and service delivery, particularly in terms of their impact on organisations' capacity to deliver the most appropriate and effective services to victims/survivors of violence.

Recommendation 1: That the Australian government commission research on the changing service sector and organisational structures of specialist women's services addressing sexual violence and domestic and family violence, and the impacts these changes are having on victims/survivors to access the services they need.

While governance structures and funding sources have changed, most services operating in the area of violence against women continue to be guided by women-centred and feminist models of practice. These models place women's and children's interests, needs and safety at the centre of all decisions

and service functions while also contributing to the “social change” work that must occur to achieve gender equality and eliminate VAW.¹⁹ Such social change work occurs both through public campaigns and community-building, and through service practices that empower women and enable self-determination, control over processes and choice. Women’s services recognise the dynamics of VAW associated with threats and harm to children and reflect the need for holistic approaches, including ensuring perpetrator accountability, to these overlapping issues.²⁰

Some services responding to violence are not limited to women, and also provide services and programs to men and others who are non-binary identifying in terms of gender. However, they do so in a way that recognises the gendered dynamics of violence. For example, rape crisis centres/services against sexual violence often provide services to male victims/survivors of sexual violence as well as to women. Their work is informed by the trauma model of recovery and feminist frameworks, both of which are attentive to power imbalances. These services therefore seek to restore power, dignity and strength to the client, while advocating more broadly for social justice and equality, recognising that:

men are subject to stereotypes and the dominating social expectations around traditional models of masculinity; and that both sexes can experience detrimental consequences resulting from these gender expectations and the violent use of power.²¹

There are also an increasing number of women’s services who work with perpetrators, run men’s behaviour change programs, work in conjunction with men’s behaviour change specialists to provide coordinated partner support and deliver men’s case management support, but they do so this without excusing the violence and abuse and so are able to hold men to account for their use of violence.²²

While there is strong international evidence on the key role of non-government women’s services in efforts to eliminate violence, as documented above, women’s services in Australia have not been in a position to gather extensive data about their own effectiveness, due to the complexity of measuring outcomes in this area, severe resource constraints and the urgency of the issues with which they have been dealing. As Astbury (2006) has pointed out in relation to services against sexual violence, “the pressing need to deliver services has understandably taken priority over evaluation of those services.”²³

Recommendation 2: That specialist women’s services develop frameworks for service evaluation, to be linked with good practice standards and options for accreditation, and that the Australian Government support and provide resources for this process.

Demand is rising and specialist women’s services urgently need more resources

As community awareness about violence against women increases and condemnation of domestic and family violence and sexual abuse becomes more widespread, demand for support services has also continued to increase. The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) Community Sector Survey 2012 reveals that over half of all domestic violence and sexual violence services surveyed reported that there is an increased demand for services. As a result, ACOSS found, clients face increased waiting times to access services they need, and support services continue to have no choice but to turn away clients at high rates.²⁴ In 2014, ACOSS reported that 72% of community legal services (including women’s legal services) were unable to meet demand. In 2013-14, community legal centres were forced to turn away 156,854 people seeking help, many of whom were victims/survivors of violence.²⁵ Refuges and other accommodation services are also under stress,

with the ACOSS research finding 51% unable to meet demand. Nearly half (47%) of counselling and individual support services surveyed by ACOSS were unable to meet demand – including sexual assault services and domestic and family violence services.²⁶

Reporting to police has also increased as state and territory police forces adopt more proactive approaches to VAW. Yet the specialist services to which police refer victims/survivors have had, at best, only very small increases in funding and have often had to deal with funding cuts. There are also impending funding cuts that will affect victims/survivors of violence, as in the case of community legal centres, including women's legal services. In Victoria, for example, police responded to 70,000 incidents of domestic and family violence in the year ending September 2015. This represents an increase of 70% since September 2011.²⁷ In the same period, the specialist services to which women are referred from incidents have received barely any additional funding.

The AIHW data for 2014-15 shows that one third of all people who accessed specialist services for homelessness (including children), have experienced domestic or family violence (sexual violence is not reported). Of these, 64% are women over the age of 15. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients are over-represented in the national client group and women living in regional, rural and remote areas are over-represented in this data as compared to clients in major cities.²⁸ Disturbingly, each day around 300 to 400 requests for homelessness assistance are unable to be met.²⁹ Homelessness Australia estimates that 2,800 women fleeing domestic violence were turned away from refuges in the year 2014-2015.³⁰ A lack of safe affordable housing means women are not able to exit the crisis system, which is a major factor putting additional pressure on services.

Early intervention efforts aimed at stopping violence from escalating are also unable to keep up with demand. Demand for men's behaviour change programs is so high that in Victoria for example the recent Royal Commission on Family Violence heard that approximately 1000 men were waiting to participate in programs as at March 2015. Of these, around 300 had been assessed as eligible but would still have to wait for up to several months to start the program proper.³¹ In many parts of Australia, no such programs exist. Expanding the reach of NGO delivered, best practice programs developed by or in partnership with specialist women's services is critical. This 'bottleneck' in service provision represents missed opportunities for intervention that have, potentially, very damaging consequences.

The level of unmet need for specialist support is even larger than that indicated by waiting times and turn-away data. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) has found that in 2012 there were at least 81,900 who women wanted to escape their current violent partner but never have.³² Even more disturbing is the finding that one in every 12 women indicated that they had escaped their abusive partner but later returned, in whole or in part because they had nowhere else to go.

Calls to the national 1800-RESPECT Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence counselling service have increased every year since it was established in 2010, and in 2014 more than 18,000 calls went unanswered, prompting additional funding in the 2015-16 budget. In May last year, Victoria's Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre reported that it had experienced a 130 per cent increase in calls to its crisis line over the previous two years, while Queensland's DV Connect hotline had seen a 35 per cent growth in calls in just the period October 2014 to May 2015. Calls to the New South Wales Domestic Violence Line grew by 6 per cent from 2013 to 2014. Both Safe Steps and DV Connect said that not only was the number of calls increasing but there was also an escalation in the severity of cases, including reports of sexual abuse, threats to kill and strangulation.³³ Importantly, these help-lines are mostly not set up to provide services other than advice and referral. These calls therefore result in increased referrals to other specialist women's services, who are dedicated to assisting with

housing, trauma recovery, legal processes and the other issues facing women attempting to build lives free of violence. However, it is clear that capacity in these services is extremely stretched.

A major problem, as outlined by Domestic Violence Victoria, is that crisis and accommodation responses to domestic and family violence are currently mainly funded through homelessness funding programs.³⁴ This approach treats domestic and family violence as if it were an intermittent issue of individual crisis, rather than the entrenched, ongoing social problem that it is. It also neglects and fails to resource the full range of supports that domestic and family violence services provide to women and children facing violence. Often, women's services need to work with clients over the long term to support their recovery, yet there is very little resourcing for this type of work. The Victorian government's commitment to establishing a dedicated funding stream at the state level (a recommendation of the Royal Commission on Family Violence) is a major positive step forward, and now needs to be mirrored in the Australian Government system and across the other states and territories.

Safe Steps CEO Annette Gillespie has identified that the more public discussion there is about violence against women, the more some men use violence (a 'backlash' effect also noted in *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*).³⁵ This has been reported by a range of support services in other jurisdictions as well. An intended and predictable effect of public discussion is to encourage victims/survivors to come forward and seek help. This increase in demand will only intensify with the national campaign to change attitudes to violence against women, which is due to commence in early 2016. It is expected that demand for services will increase as more women and families identify violence and seek support. The implicit commitment is that help will be there. Governments that are vocal in condemning violence, as they should be, also have a serious responsibility to ensure adequate and appropriate services exist regardless of geographic location or cultural diversity.

Recommendations 3: That the Australian Government, in cooperation with the State and Territory governments

- a) *Immediately reverse funding cuts and substantially increase funding to key areas including specialist domestic and family violence support services, domestic violence outreach services, women's refuges, sexual assault services, women's legal services, specialist women's court support services, community-controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and community based specialists working with LGBTIQ communities, women with disability and culturally and linguistically diverse communities*
- b) *Initiate a consultative process to determine full costing for the range of services needed to effectively respond to violence against women and children, to inform the development of the 2017-18 budget.*
- c) *Create a dedicated and recurrent funding stream through partnership with the states and territories that supports the breadth of work specialist women and children's family violence services do to respond to family violence, which is not adequately resourced or measured by homelessness funding*
- d) *Commit to a whole of government approach to reducing violence against women and their children, which articulates the roles and responsibilities of the relevant Australian Government portfolios in addressing this issue. This would be supported by a budget planning and reporting framework to publicly account for the money allocated to preventing and responding to violence against women across all Australian Government departments*
- e) *Allocate adequate funding to enable a comprehensive response to the findings of the COAG Advisory Panel and the implementation of the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children.*

Immediate and urgently required funding increases for crisis support should complement increased investment in primary prevention, as outlined in the *Change the Story* prevention framework, so that over the longer term the prevalence of violence and consequently the need for services will decline.

Not just ‘any old service’ is needed

It is not simply a matter of expanding generalist services to absorb demand. People who have had domestic and sexual violence inflicted upon them have specific needs that specialist services and workers are best placed to address.

Approximately 40-45 per cent of women who experience physical abuse from an intimate partner are also forced into sexual activities by them, compounding the impacts on self-esteem and coping skills, increased fear and anxiety problems, and high levels of self-blame that are the consequences of domestic and family violence.³⁶ This is one of the reasons why it is critically important for clients’ safety and perceptions of safety to be protected in the service setting - in terms of the gender of service workers and other clients (as in women-only service settings), and in terms of the ways service workers respond to clients.³⁷ The complexity of the situation for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer victims/survivors must also be met with appropriate service responses.

In 2002, the Salvation Army developed a set of standards for counselling practice, based on feminist principles of empowerment and knowledge about the gendered dynamics of violence. This was in response to the negative experiences reported by women who had received counselling from mainstream providers who were inadequately trained and ill-equipped. For example, “many women reported that they were encouraged by their counsellors to attempt to negotiate with their partners and to consider the domestic violence a symptom of communication problems between the couple”. Disturbingly, “some were encouraged by counsellors to examine and change their own behaviour in order to decrease levels of violence.”³⁸ Likewise, Christine Craik has noted the severe consequences of inappropriate responses to help-seeking or disclosure:

Every time I received a response like that it made me stay silent for another few years...Specialist family violence services don’t inflict such damage on family violence survivors. These services...offer a space where a survivor/victim does not need to “convince” the worker of their very difficult situation.³⁹

These reports highlight both the importance of having specialist women’s services, and the need for mainstream service providers to become more knowledgeable and competent in the areas of sexual violence and domestic and family violence. We must put specialist women’s services at the heart of our service system, and resource them to lead best practice across the health and community services landscape. Significant funding, workforce development and consistent policy and practice development is required if we are to meet the demand and the needs of all women, families and communities impacted by violence.

The service system: what is happening now and what needs to change?

Governments have committed to strengthening support services to end violence against women and have reaffirmed this commitment through *The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children Outcome 4: Services should meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence*. The international and Australian evidence outlined in this paper unequivocally demonstrates that specialist services are best placed to meet the needs of our communities. However, to date efforts at the national level under Action Plans One and Two of the National Plan

have failed to adequately recognise and value the role of specialist women's services and acknowledge the challenges of continually developing best practice service models while meeting rising demand.

To date, actions towards National Plan Outcome 4 have been focused on national services such as 1800RESPECT and DV-Alert (Domestic Violence Response Training program for health and allied health workers). While these are valuable initiatives, if we are to make real, sustained progress towards Outcome 4, substantial attention and value must be placed on the leading contributions of specialist women's services, which provide the bulk of on-the-ground assistance to women and children. These services are partially funded by various Australian Government departments, and many are delivered under contract with State and Territory Governments, who utilise a range of different approaches. Domestic Violence NSW reports that the majority of specialist domestic and family violence services receive funding from multiple sources and have to manage multiple, small resource allocations just to offer core best practice services to clients. The Victorian Government has committed to implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Family Violence⁴⁰, and the Queensland Government has adopted the recommendations of the *Not Now, Not Ever* report⁴¹, both of which include important reforms to strengthen the position of specialist women's services. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has indicated in-principle support for joint actions recommended by the Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children, which include measures to improve service provision.⁴² However, the complexity and variation of our federal system make it a challenging task to strengthen service provision across the country as a whole. Unless this task is defined and undertaken, however, it will certainly not be achieved. Procurement trends and service reforms in various areas continue to unintentionally undermine women's specialist services.

In NSW, competitive tendering under the Going Home Staying Home homelessness sector reforms (2012–2014) led to the loss of specialist domestic and family violence services and specialist workers, including the transfer of government-owned properties originally allocated specifically to domestic and family violence support to other homelessness services. This reform occurred in the context of growing demand and ongoing uncertainty about Australian Government homelessness funding, although in November 2015 the NSW Government announced that all currently funded specialist and mainstream homelessness services will have their funding extended to 2020. Competitive tendering meant that services were pitted against each other and long standing connections and partnerships built over many years were damaged or destroyed. Services continue to report feeling disconnected from other referral agencies and in some areas specialist women's services continue to identify issues within service partnerships and a lack of understanding from partners about the specialist nature of working with women and families impacted by violence and trauma.

Ultimately this impacts negatively on women and children who are seeking support. The NSW government maintains that all women's refuges "owned by" the NSW Government continue to operate ("ownership" here referring to the property at which the service is provided)⁴³, but advocacy group SOS Women's Services estimates that 75% of women's refuges have been transferred to larger charities, and pressure on all homelessness services means that much of the important early intervention and prevention work that was undertaken by smaller specialists is now unable to be delivered. Specialist and mainstream NSW domestic and family violence services contracted to work with victims/survivors report being at capacity most, if not all, of the time. This often leaves women and their families stranded without access to safety and the specialist best practice supports delivered by a competent and knowledgeable service.⁴⁴

While a KPMG early review of Going Home Staying Home acknowledged that the procurement process was rushed and favoured larger providers, the full impact on the appropriateness and

effectiveness of service provision particularly for women and families impacted by domestic and family violence is yet to be evaluated with a long term evaluation process due to report in 2018.⁴⁵

The core underlying factor that further impacts on the capacity of NSW services to meet demand is a growing lack of affordable housing and an increase in the number of homeless women, men and families. Women and children often simply have nowhere to go. Specialist and mainstream crisis and refuge services are full and the NSW Government has substantially increased its use of motels for temporary accommodation when women need to leave their home in crisis and seek safety. Domestic Violence NSW and other advocates maintain that all women and their families should be able to access culturally safe services that meet their needs and that outreach support delivered to clients in temporary accommodation in motels is not a safe alternative.

The recent NSW experience is an example of the need for better recognition and protection of the work of specialist women's services and a nuanced understanding of the support that victim-survivors require when escaping domestic and family violence. The Australian government should lead this work, through the National Plan, funding strategies and a whole of government commitment to eliminating violence against women.

Recommendation 4: That the Australian government, through its policy and funded program work

- a) explicitly identify specialist women's services as the central element of our responses to violence against women and children*
- b) reform funding systems so that the central role of specialist women's services is protected and maintained*
- c) introduce mechanisms to track the steps all Australian governments are taking to strengthen the capacity of specialist women's services, and monitor the impacts of this work on the ability of women and children to access appropriate support.*

In addition to recognising the role of specialist women's services, there is an urgent need to codify and apply practice standards and principles developed by women's services and specialists, as described above, and to embed adherence with these standards into State/Territory and Australian Government funding and procurement processes. Substantial investment is required for ongoing workforce development to ensure that the specialist sector can continue to grow and develop best practice and share this with mainstream services.

This work can build upon standards already developed including the NASASV *Standards of Practice Manual for Services Against Sexual Violence*⁴⁶, the *National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions*⁴⁷, Domestic Violence Victoria's *Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children*⁴⁸, the Victorian Government's *Practice guidelines: women and children's family violence counselling and support programs*⁴⁹, and other state/territory-based practice standards. Standards development can draw on work at the international level, such as the Council of Europe's *Minimum standards for support services*.⁵⁰ It can also take into account work on standards that will be undertaken by the Victorian government in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Family Violence.⁵¹ The structure and resourcing for this work should be established at a national level, and should include considering options for accreditation.

Recommendation 5:

- a) That specialist services through their peak bodies and networks codify good practice standards and principles for the delivery of services in response to violence against women and their children*
- b) That the Australian Government fund and support the process of codifying good practice standards, and apply these standards through funding and procurement systems.*

A set of national standards is necessary for evidence-based evaluation and to ensure reflective practice and continual improvements.

There are a number of substantial areas of improvement that specialists have identified beyond the current issues relating to access and service capacity. These include the inaccessibility and inappropriateness of many services in relation to the needs of women with disability; equality of access and appropriate community-based responses for LGBTIQ victims/survivors and perpetrators; rapidly evolving technology-facilitated abuse and the use of technology in overcoming violence; competent and specific support to children in situations of violence; the role of community-led services specific to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and communities, and to women and communities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; service provision in low-resource/low-service settings including remote and regional Australia; and the challenge of embedding an intersectional analysis of violence across all service provision and prevention work.

Consolidated recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Australian Government commission research on the changing service sector and organisational structures of specialist women's services addressing sexual violence and domestic and family violence, and the impacts these changes are having on victims/survivors to access the services they need.

Recommendation 2: That specialist women's services develop frameworks for service evaluation, to be linked with good practice standards and options for accreditation, and that the Australian Government support and provide resources for this process.

Recommendations 3: That the Australian Government, in cooperation with the State and Territory governments:

- a) Immediately reverse funding cuts and substantially increase funding to key areas including specialist domestic and family violence support services, domestic violence outreach services, women's refuges, sexual assault services, women's legal services, specialist women's court support services, community-controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and community based specialists working with LGBTIQ communities, women with disability and culturally and linguistically diverse communities*
- b) Initiate a consultative process to determine full costing for the range of services needed to effectively respond to violence against women and children, to inform the development of the 2017-18 budget*
- c) Create a dedicated and recurrent funding stream through partnership with the states and territories that supports the breadth of work specialist women and children's family violence services do to respond to family violence, which is not adequately resourced or measured by homelessness funding*
- d) Commit to a whole of government approach to reducing violence against women and their children, which articulates the roles and responsibilities of the relevant Australian Government portfolios in addressing this issue. This would be supported by a budget planning and reporting framework to publicly account for the money allocated to preventing and responding to violence against women across all Australian Government departments*

- e) *Allocate adequate funding to enable a comprehensive response to the findings of the COAG Advisory Panel and the implementation of the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children.*

Recommendation 4: That the Australian Government, through its policy and funded program work:

- a) *Explicitly identify specialist women's services as the central element of our responses to violence against women and children*
b) *Reform funding systems so that the central role of specialist women's services is protected and maintained*
c) *Introduce mechanisms to track the steps all Australian governments are taking to strengthen the capacity of specialist women's services, and monitor the impacts of this work on the ability of women and children to access appropriate support.*

Recommendation 5:

- c) *That specialist services through their peak bodies and networks codify good practice standards and principles for the delivery of services in response to violence against women and their children*
d) *That the Australian government fund and support the process of codifying good practice standards, and apply these standards through funding and procurement systems.*

References

¹ A recent legal ruling has established that failure to provide access to immediate protection (in this case where a victim could not access a shelter and had no legal or other avenues to create safety) will mean a state is in violation of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women. See *AT v Hungary* - CEDAW Committee Recommendation No. 19 para 24 (r) (iii); Beijing Platform Strategic Objective D1 para 125 (a), echoed by the Secretary General at p80 of his report; CEDAW Committee Decision 2005 Communication No.2/2003. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/decisions-views/CEDAW%20Decision%20on%20AT%20vs%20Hungary%20English.pdf>

² Commission on the Status of Women, 57th session (2013) Agreed Conclusions on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women. E/CN.6/2013/11 <http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/57/csw57-agreedconclusions-a4-en.pdf?v=1&d=20140917T100700> clause A(c).

³ UN Women (2012) Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence against Women <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2012/7/handbook-for-national-action-plans-on-violence-against-women> p. 44.

⁴ Bevacqua, M. (2000), *Rape on the Public Agenda: Feminism and the Politics of Sexual Assault*, Boston: Northeastern University Press; Dobash, R.E. & Dobash R.P. (1992), *Women, Violence and Social Change*, London: Routledge; Schechter, S. (1982), *Women and male violence: the visions and struggles of the battered women's movement*, Boston, South End Press.

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