



## PRIORITY AREA

### UTILISE A COLLABORATIVE, COORDINATED AND ADEQUATELY RESOURCED APPROACH TO PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A coalition of organisations is calling on the next Western Australian Government to commit to improving the systems that are meant to keep victims of domestic and family violence safe and hold perpetrators to account for their violence.

Inadequate systemic responses increase risk to women and children. It is imperative that in Western Australia we do not make assurances that the system will provide the safety net that women and children need and then fail to deliver because resources are spread so thin. Strong leadership and political will is instrumental to improving the system for victims of violence, holding perpetrators accountable and, in time, preventing violence from occurring.

We call on all political parties to demonstrate accountability and leadership in preventing violence against women and their children by putting domestic and family violence at the top of the agenda and committing to utilise a collaborative, coordinated and adequately resourced approach to preventing violence against women.

### Key asks:

- Significantly increase funding for frontline services including refuges, advocacy services, community legal centres, safe at home programs
- Revise the WA Family and Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy to 2022 and future Action Plans to:
  - align with the outcomes with the National Plan of Action to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children and the National Prevention Framework (Change the Story);
  - address the root causes of violence against women and expressly refer to gender and intersecting inequalities that contribute to violence against women;
  - include interventions across individual, community, institutional and societal levels to address men's violence against women; such as

- Respectful Relationships Education in all schools, applying a gender lens to the development of policy and legislation; and
- ensure effective monitoring and evaluating mechanisms are built in and transparently communicate who is responsible for what actions
  - Ensure future state strategic planning concerning violence against women is informed by broad consultation across sectors and community

## Key Issues:

### A well resourced, sustainable service and support system

Achieving safe systems requires a well resourced, sustainable service and support system. It is urgent that we expand funding for accessible, specialist, targeted, culturally safe, client-centred services that meet the health, housing, justice and legal needs of all women and children experiencing domestic and family violence. Western Australia desperately needs proper investment in these services. Increased funding is necessary for all sections of the sector – from refuges to legal support services to housing and health services for women and children affected by domestic and family violence.

### Housing

There is an urgent need to address the housing response to domestic and family violence. Women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence are often required to navigate lengthy and fragmented processes when attempting to access safe and affordable housing. The process includes moving between various types of accommodation that lack security of tenure and/or fail to provide a sense of safety. The lack of stability generated through constantly relocating can impact directly on the ability of women and children to attain a life free from violence. Additionally, the implications of children's experience of homelessness are extensive.

Women's refuge services are essential for ensuring the safety of women and children who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing violence within the home. Women who do not have access to alternative accommodation options are more likely to remain in their home with the perpetrator and are therefore exposed to ongoing violence. Currently, women and children escaping domestic and family violence risk having to return or remain in an unsafe environment because women's refuges and crisis services do not have the room to accommodate them.

Safe, affordable and appropriate housing enables women to achieve safety, stability and economic and social wellbeing. Safety for women and children requires:

- Increased protections and support for women living with violence whose private tenancies or mortgages are compromised.

- A substantial expansion of the "safe at home" approach, under which women and children remain in the family home, where possible, while a perpetrator has to leave.
- Rental or mortgage subsidies and electronic personal safety devices, as well as police monitoring.
- Housing and homelessness services with the certainty they need to plan and effectively deliver housing and support to women and children escaping violence.

Blockages in the system; short-term accommodation; and unsafe housing options are undermining other efforts within the service system to help women and children recover from violence. Once women and children who have experienced violence are housed in a safe place, they can begin to rebuild their lives.

### Legal assistance services

Due to systemic gender inequity, women face widespread discrimination and disadvantage in all aspects of their lives. On average, women are less able to realise their human rights than men. Women are more likely to be poorer than men - the gender pay gap has increased to 19.9% calculated on full-time base remuneration and this combined with caring responsibilities means women generally retire with significantly less superannuation than men. Women's health outcomes are likely to be worse than men and they often experience multiple and compounding forms of systemic disadvantage that may impact on their access to legal services.

Legal assistance services – Legal Aid Commissions, Community Legal Centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services - including specialist women's legal services and specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's legal services are vital to address this gap in service provision, for enabling women to access legal supports and for ensuring women's rights are upheld. The provision of free and accessible legal support for women who experience disadvantage is imperative and we must continue to have properly funded specialist women's legal services, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's legal services. These services are vital in enabling and supporting women to exercise their legal rights. They have a thorough understanding of the nature and dynamics of domestic and family violence and are able to recognise intersecting and compounding forms of disadvantage. Such specialist knowledge is required to deliver a consistent and safe justice system.

It is crucial that the newly elected Government take full consideration of the vital support that legal assistance services and particularly specialist women's legal services, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's legal services provide to women. Further, we also draw attention to the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services in providing targeted and culturally appropriate

support and legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. It is also important that victims of violence have a range of legal services from which to choose so they can exercise agency or, where there is a conflict of interest, there is another legal assistance service to offer assistance.

A newly elected Government must ensure that there is increased legal assistance funding, including for specialist women's legal services and other legal services that provide gender and culturally safe trauma-specialist domestic and family violence and sexual assault expertise. Access to domestic and family violence services remains a key problem among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Western Australians. As a means of responding to this issue, it is crucial to increase funding to Aboriginal-community-controlled organisations to provide frontline services. These services are more likely to deliver culturally sensitive programs; which is likely to increase community access.

Mainstream services must also become culturally sensitive and responsive so that they, too, can provide services to Aboriginal Western Australians. It takes time and resources to create a service that is considered culturally safe. The domestic and family violence service sector is currently overwhelmed with day-to-day crisis delivery, and needs to be supported in this activity.

### **Children and young people**

Too often, the voices, experiences and needs of children are relegated to the periphery. It is important to recognise that responding to the current crisis in domestic and family violence is not just about responding to adults but to all those in the family unit affected by the violence. Improving the conditions of individual children may also assist in stemming the intergenerational violence that continues to plague our communities.

There is extensive evidence of the serious and lasting effects of domestic and family violence on the children who experience it, whether as witnesses or the subjects of violence themselves. It is of critical importance to increase funding for specialised responses for children and young people, from supported accommodation options for young people experiencing domestic and family violence; culturally sensitive, trauma-informed counselling to children who are placed in out-of-home care due to issues of domestic and family; and therapeutic work with mothers and their children to rebuild their attachment, so often eroded through domestic and family violence.

Attachments/relationships can improve over time, and parenting and child health outcomes also improve once the violence stops. It is critical that there is investment in interventions to strengthen and support a healthy mother-child relationship.

### **A secure, long-term funding commitment**

A dedicated funding stream for domestic and family violence in the state budget will ensure not only that funding is secure and transparent, but also that it is

based on forecasted demand, so that all sections of the domestic and family violence sector can plan their workforce and service delivery knowing that they can respond to demand. It creates space and opportunities for innovative practice, workforce development and creative partnerships with other agencies outside the sector.

### **Preventing violence against women and children into the future**

There is a growing evidence base on the underlying causes of violence against women and children. These include the attitudes, behaviours, practices and systems that may promote, justify, excuse or condone it. As yet there has been no long-term commitment to funding primary prevention initiatives and to the comprehensive, well-resourced inclusion of respectful relationship education within the Western Australian school system.

It is essential that the newly elected Government significantly strengthens the delivery of a respectful relationships program across Western Australian schools and early years services with dedicated investment in the 2017/18 Budget.

Respectful Relationships education promotes positive attitudes and behaviours among children and young people and is aimed at preventing domestic and family violence. Early intervention is vital to preventing domestic and family violence and a 'whole-of-school' approach to supporting respectful relationships is part of the solution.

Investment in primary prevention in Western Australia is long overdue. Adequate prevention, best practice responses and early intervention measures require significantly more investment by the Western Australian Government.

Furthermore, while acknowledging some important work underway, the Western Australian jurisdictional response to the National Plan cannot deal effectively with high-risk communities without additional funding.

The impacts of disadvantage, poverty and intergenerational violence, which are evident in many of our communities, must be urgently addressed but with a commitment to long-term resourcing. Aboriginal communities in Western Australia require a long-term commitment and resourcing of effective and culturally appropriate domestic and family violence strategies. Short-term funded projects cannot address highly complex issues. Transient programs and initiatives affect an organisation's ability to build relationships of trust in the community and this diminishes the impact of this crucial work.

A coordinated and long-term prevention plan for Western Australia involves constructing and adequately investing in a clear plan for better educating young people about respectful relationships and creating a framework for training justice workers such as lawyers, police and judicial officers about the nature and dynamics of domestic and family violence. Currently, prevention programs have been piecemeal and underfunded. We need increased investment in prevention to

reduce costs in the long-term and ensure we do not create another generation of women and children whose lives are overshadowed by violence.

A co-ordinated approach to prevention would include:

- Respectful relationship education that focuses on promoting gender equality and violence prevention.
- Developing and investing in a Western Australian specific program based on the principles of Victoria's Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program and education programs for women with disability about the nature of violence.
- Providing ongoing training to police, prosecutors, judicial officers, court staff, legal practitioners and other justice workers on risk assessment and management, the nature and dynamics of domestic and family violence, victims' experiences and navigating gender bias in the legal system.
- Dedicated funding for the prevention of family violence.

It is essential that the incoming Government harness the specialist expertise and infrastructure of all sections of the domestic and family violence sector and work with them to scale up existing prevention and gender equity work.

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