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For Immediate Release

Women on Temporary Visas in Crisis within a Crisis

Women on temporary visas and their children suffering domestic violence and abuse are not eligible to access the vital services they need to be safe – simply because of their visa status.

A recent survey of 34 specialist domestic, family and sexual violence service providers conducted by DVNSW found 369 people on temporary visas experiencing violence sought or received assistance in May 2020. Across the whole of NSW this number is likely to be much higher.

The survey found that 36% of services were unable to provide temporary accommodation and another 36% could not provide crisis accommodation for women on temporary visas.

Whilst some service providers are able to provide limited support to these women through donations that they receive, over 82% reported that it was not possible to secure long-term accommodation for their clients. Similarly with no access to Medicare or Centrelink there was limited access to critical services and support with many service providers unable to provide women with counselling (45%), legal advice (55%), financial assistance (39%), and health assistance (33%).

The isolation and economic impact of COVID-19 has been even more catastrophic for women on temporary visas, with 45% of services reporting an increase in violence, 64% reporting a decrease in access to income food and other essentials, 64% reporting a decrease in access to community and family support and 48% reporting a decrease in access to referral pathways.

“Every person suffering domestic and family violence should be able to access income, healthcare, housing, legal advice, counselling and other supports they need. Women on temporary visas and their children are not only victims to the crimes of the perpetrator but also to government policies and systems that exclude them from the critical supports they need to be safe.” said Delia Donovan, CEO DVNSW.

DVNSW is advocating to the NSW and Commonwealth governments, as a member of the National Advocacy Group for Women on Temporary Visas experiencing Violence and as an Advisory Group member of AWAVA. DVNSW recommends that people on temporary visas experiencing violence have full and immediate access to:

- Social security and Medicare benefits so people can access food, other essentials and healthcare to stay safe and healthy during the COVID-19 crisis
- Temporary, crisis, social and public housing, rental assistance and Safe at Home programs so people can socially isolate safely

- Free legal advice and representation so people can understand how the law can help keep them and their children safe under migration law, family law and domestic and family violence law
- Free interpreting services so people can understand how to stay safe and well during the COVID-19 crisis and access essential services

DVNSW additionally recommends amending the Family Violence provisions in the Migration Regulations and creating a new temporary visa for people experiencing domestic and family violence. This would enable access to Medicare, housing and income support as well as, with the necessary funding in place, to specialist domestic and family violence and legal services, so that people can access the support needed without the fear of being deported.

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Contact:

Delia Donovan – Interim CEO, DVNSW 0400 936 192

About:

Domestic Violence NSW is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW. DVNSW provides a representative and advocacy function for specialist services and the women, families and communities they support. Their mission is to eliminate domestic and family violence through leadership in policy, advocacy, partnerships and the promotion of best practice.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence help can be found via:

- **1800RESPECT** or 1800 732 732 which offers a national counselling helpline, information and support
- **NSW Domestic Violence Line** 1800 65 64 63 which offers a state-wide counselling helpline, information and support
- **Men's Referral Service** 1300 766 491 for men, or friends and family of men using violence