



2020 Economic Stimulus & Budget Submission

Domestic Violence NSW

Our asks

- 1. Invest in the construction of 5,000 social housing properties every year for the next 10 years**
- 2. Increase the funding for the Specialist Homelessness Services Program by 20%.**

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Overview of the housing crisis in NSW

Homelessness can occur where there is the absence of one or more elements of a home such as inadequate housing, no tenure or sense of safety. Whilst the experiences of women and children experiencing homelessness as a result of domestic and family is diverse the impact of homelessness is undeniably significant and ongoing. In NSW crisis and transitional accommodation provided by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) remains the principle response for people experiencing homelessness. In 2018/19 SHS providers assisted 73,500 people in NSW. Significantly, Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) accounted for the largest cohort of people seeking assistance at 34%, with the next largest group 31.7% being those experiencing mental health difficulties. Of the overall homeless population seeking assistance from SHS providers, 36% of all people assisted by the SHS were categorised as single parent families with children¹. This additionally illustrates the high number of children who experience homelessness, many of whom have been impacted by Domestic and Family Violence.

Over the past decade the NSW Government has developed a number of programs that aim to alleviate the pressure on the social housing system whilst assisting women and children to stay safe. This has comprised of a range of programs within the current service designed to keep women safe at home ([Staying Home Leaving Violence](#)) and short term assistance such as access to private rental, including the [Rent Choice Start Safely](#) subsidy. However, for many women and especially those with young and/or traumatised children there are inherent problems with this system including; a chronic shortage of availability / affordable private rental housing in areas near community, services and schools, a lack of free or affordable pre-school childcare and before/ after school, a lack of available employment options and underemployment (due to gender inequality, child care needs and responsibilities and issues with the benefits system), and the three year period not being long enough for women with more complex needs.

Prior to COVID-19, research indicated that, despite the investment in Specialist Homelessness Services' (SHS), thousands of vulnerable women with dependent children were experiencing homelessness every year in NSW as a result of domestic and family violence. Whilst SHS are able to move women seeking assistance into temporary housing, very few move into stable, long-term, appropriate accommodation. The absence of a housing pathway that concludes with secure long term housing is further evidenced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) the SHS Annual report 2018-19. They concede that at the end of a support period, 5.4% of persons experiencing domestic and family violence have

no shelter or are living in improvised dwellings. Furthermore 14% are 'couch surfing' with no tenure plan and 20% remain in short-term temporary accommodation. ⁱⁱ

It's also important to acknowledge that SHS data does not reflect the true homelessness numbers for women due to the hidden nature of women's homelessness and often misconception of their realities in homelessness. It is known that many women will stay with friends or family, as opposed to seeking support from the SHS. As such, SHS data does not represent the full extent of the issues we face today. When considering the housing options and programs provided by the SHS it becomes evident that the current system is not able to respond sufficiently to homelessness as it is unable to provide a pathway to **affordable, suitable and long term housing**.

Over the past ten years, social housing as a proportion of overall New South Wales housing has declined which is a major contributing factor to the problem of homelessness. The Auditor General reported in 2016 that Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) has been disposing of more properties than it has added in recent years (except during the National Economic Stimulus Building years 2009 to 2012)ⁱⁱⁱ. Before COVID-19, there was a waiting list of 50,000 people for social housing across NSW ^{iv} and 231,000 low-income households paid more than 30 per cent of their income in rent in the private rental market.^v

Many women report that the housing options that are available to them are generally poorly maintained or may be in an area that feels unsafe or dangerous. Service providers report that many women will often decide to return to a violent partner because they consider this to be a safer option than the alternatives due to absence of money, family, financial support or stable housing^{vi}

It is clear that the current system is not working effectively. An absence of appropriate exit accommodation means that SHS assistance is not able to function as a mechanism for moving people along a housing pathway. The NSW government's reliance on private rental subsidies as a way to achieve long term housing outcomes is also problematic as this is not an option for many women experiencing homelessness due to barriers such as **affordable supply, competition, and inadequate income support**.

The current situation

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, 39% of service providers reported an increase in demand and increasing rates of domestic violence^{vii}. In March 2020 a [\\$21 million funding boost](#) for DFV

services was announced as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. \$7 million of this was committed to existing SHS providers. The NSW Department of Communities and Justice has recently allocated \$3 million of this funding to a range of Domestic and Family Violence Services who provide housing and homelessness support. This includes; Staying Home Leaving Violence, Integrated Domestic and Family Violence, Service Support Funds (where delivering a DFV response) and Domestic Violence Enhancement. A further \$4 million has been allocated to the SHS Women's Refuges, with approximately \$1 million of this amount going to a Pop up Refuge in the Northern Beeches. A further \$6 million has been utilised to expand Start Safely, resulting in 370 additional rental assistance packages being made available.

A further [\\$36 million has recently been announced](#) to provide 2 year accommodation with wrap around support for people who are rough sleepers through the [Together Home](#) (Housing First model). The primary target for this housing assistance is people who were rough sleepers and assisted into temporary accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic^{viii}.

To date no funds have been allocated to providing supportive **long term** housing options for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

Whilst funding provided as part of the Governments response to COVID-19 is highly welcomed by services, who are struggling to meet demand, the continuation of temporary accommodation arrangements and the extension of current programs cannot deliver positive and sustainable long term outcomes. Without additional social housing vulnerable women and children will remain in crisis and transitional housing for longer than is appropriate and places additional pressure on the crisis housing response system. Tragically, it also places additional stress and anxiety on women and children who are already exposed to high stress, fear and anxiety. Additional pressures added around house insecurity and the risk of homelessness is unjust and unacceptable.

Finally, it can be questioned whether the current housing pathway makes the optimal use of taxpayer's funds as the provision of long term sustainable affordable and social housing is a vital cost effective and sustainable response to reducing homelessness. For the majority of women private rental accommodation is unaffordable. Of the small number of women who are able to secure housing through the Start Safely subsidy it is unknown if the tenancy is sustained. Further, DCJ data collection does not include the number of women that represent as homeless following a SHS support period. It is known, however, that at least 30% of vulnerable women and children have no long term housing options at the end that support

period, which can bring about longer term risk and impacts to social outcomes. This raises a question mark regarding the effectiveness of a system that focuses on the provision of temporary accommodation to the exclusion of social and affordable housing. Both responses must be considered and combined, with temporary accommodation being treated as crisis response as opposed to a solution.

The bottom line

There is an urgent need to build more social and affordable housing in NSW.

Secure, stable and long term social and affordable housing is critical to promote the safety, wellbeing and best possible outcomes of women and children. The housing system is at capacity and there are no other solutions available.

Our Asks

DVNSW calls upon the NSW Government to rapidly increase the level of social and affordable housing to ensure that women and children escaping domestic and family violence can be safely housed. This will require:

1. Invest in the construction of 5,000 social housing properties every year for the next 10 years

Supporting the construction of new buildings and purchasing existing developments (impacted by the COVID-19 economic downturn) will go a long way in assisting the 40% of people experiencing domestic and family violence who have no long term housing at the end of an SHS support period. This approach also provide much needed stimulus to the NSW economy. It is estimated that 85,000 construction jobs and 97,000 small or medium sized businesses are at risk due to the economic impacts of COVID-19 ^{ix}

2. Increase the funding for the Specialist Homelessness Services Program by 20%.

SHS services providing support to women escaping domestic and family violence have continued to provide high quality support despite increasing demand and working within an environment of funding uncertainty. In October 2019, the NSW Government announced 12 month contract extensions with additional requirements including progress towards gaining Australian Service Excellence Standards (ASES), progress towards collecting data and implementing processes to report on outcomes, contributing towards the premiers priority to halve street homelessness (where relevant to the organisation), enhancing culturally accessible services for Aboriginal people, and participating in local governance and service coordination.

There is presently limited evidence regarding the long term outcomes for women escaping domestic and family violence, including how many women re-present as homeless following a support period which is often reported by services. The focus of the new SHS contract requirements on quality improvement is not one aspect of what is needed. The funding model misses a crucial element that being the need for a housing pathway that enables the provision of support for longer periods of time coupled with the availability of long-term affordable housing.

It is widely accepted that SHS services who are operating in an increasingly difficult environment with increased demand and limited resources. A 20% increase in funding, coupled with a minimum 5 year contract, would provide greater certainty to whilst enabling services to provide a much needed continuum of support. This would be a

strength based approach to working with women impacted by domestic and family violence to sustain their accommodation, as well as providing NSW Government with baseline data on homeless women which to compare the long term outcomes for women exiting SHS.

ⁱ AHURi Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence, Final Report Number 311: April 2009

ⁱⁱ AHURi Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence, Final Report Number 311: April 2009

ⁱⁱⁱ Audit Office of New South Wales. New South Wales Auditor-General's Report, Making the best use of public housing NSW, NSW Land and Housing Corporation, 30 July 2013

^{iv} Davidson, P., Saunders, P., Bradbury, B. and Wong, M. (2020), Poverty in Australia 2020: Part 1, Overview. ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 3, Sydney: ACOSS.

^v Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019), Catalogue 4130.0 - Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2017-18

^{vi} Commonwealth of Australia (2008) The Road Home, A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness

^{vii} Equity Economics, Supporting Economic Recovery in NSW: investment in Social and Affordable Housing is Critical to Supporting Jobs Today and Families into the Future

^{viii} NSW Department of Communities and Justice, Fact Sheet Together Homes Program June 2020