

OVERVIEW OF DVNSW AND CWA REGIONAL DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE ROUNDTABLE

On 8 December 2020, Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) and the Country Women's Association NSW (CWA NSW) hosted a Regional Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Roundtable. Attendees included:

- The Hon. Mark Speakman, SC MP, Attorney General and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
- Ms (Trish) Trisha Doyle, Shadow Minister for Women and the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, and the Shadow Minister for Emergency Services
- The Hon. (Bronnie) Bronwyn Taylor, MLC, Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women was unable to attend and provided a video address
- 18 DVNSW member services
- 5 CWA NSW representatives
- 5 Women's Safety NSW member services

The roundtable highlighted a range of systemic issues and service gaps in supporting victim-survivors and responding to perpetrators of DFV in rural, regional and outer metropolitan NSW. The discussion focused on four priority areas identified by the attendees prior to the roundtable.

1. Access to DFV services, geographical and social isolation, and lack of infrastructure

- Fund small, local community organisations to provide services to their local communities. Local organisations better understand local community needs. Current funding models tend to privilege large NGOs with resources to apply for grants who are often funded to provide outreach only which is insufficient to meet local needs. Some organisations are funded under the Targeted Early Intervention Program and do not receive DFV specific funding. Funding for services should take into account that there is significant under-reporting of DFV, particularly in regional areas, which is not captured in police data about DFV.
- Increase funding to a diverse range of DFV services, including organisations that provide early support, DFV education and case management support for victim-survivors. Victim-survivors need ongoing support after being engaged through Safer Pathway and services that provide case management support need more funding. Whilst COVID-19 crisis funding is welcome, much more is needed to address chronic under-funding of the sector.
- Increase supports for middle aged and older women including by providing community education about DFV, information about supports available and improving cross-sector collaboration between specialist women's services and DFV services. Due to greater social isolation and less community awareness of DFV than in metropolitan areas, middle aged and older women may not realise the perpetrator is using DFV.
- Improve access to supports for families in outer rural areas who face additional barriers.
- Increase investment in DFV-specific counselling and child and adolescent counselling services by Women's Health Centres.
- Improve access to case management and other supports for First Nations women and women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including women on temporary visas.
- Adopt a public health approach to preventing DFV, including by providing community education to children from an early age.

2. Access to justice – police, justice system and legal supports

- Provide mandatory ongoing and updated DFV training across the NSW Police.
Police need to be trained to respond to DFV, and should always offer an interpreter. Regular audits should be made to ensure police attend training and improve accountability.
- Fund and resource police to respond more quickly to DFV in regional and rural areas.
Police in regional and rural areas cover vast geographical area and wait times are long, which endangers the safety of women and children experiencing DFV.
- Improve access to migration lawyers for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- Provide safe rooms in courts.
A lack of safe rooms in regional courts means that women are forced to have conversations in front of others, who may include the perpetrator.
- Ensure all courts prioritise the safety of women and children and advocate for increased funding to the family court system.
When courts assess the conditions placed on bail, including assessing mental health and safety issues, there needs to be a much stronger focus on the safety of women and children. The family court system should also be funded to resolve matters more quickly. At the moment, there is a two year waitlist, including for complex DFV matters. This adversely impacts on women and children and the child protection system.
- Enable victim-survivors to have the option to access restorative and transformative justice.
We need to look at ways of creating a community of care that does not create more harm and that does not further traumatise and harm people who have experienced DFV.

3. Access to affordable housing

- Increase availability of affordable housing and crisis accommodation in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas, including for older, single women, women on temporary visas, women with disability, women with sons over 14 years of age, and women with animals.
- Some services have a waiting list of over a month e.g. A refuge in Dubbo has 50 people on the waiting list for only five rooms. This means that women stay with or return to a violent partner because they do not anywhere safe to go. Many services do not allow boys over 14 years old into refuges and mothers do not want to leave their sons. Women on temporary visas often face additional barriers to support due to no access to income. Due to the ongoing housing crisis and COVID-19 crisis leading to an influx of people from the cities, more people are at risk of homelessness. There is a need for infrastructure funding to provide accessible self-contained accommodation for older women, women with disability and women with animals. Current buildings are often inaccessible to being very old and multiple storey and they have also shared kitchens and bathrooms which has been an issue with COVID-19. The SHS Program is underfunded and does not meet the needs for support from victim-survivors of DFV. This puts a stress on workers and leads to burnout. Solutions that enable women and children to safely remain at home should also be provided.
- Provide specific accommodation for First Nations women.
Aboriginal workers have highlighted the need for Aboriginal-specific accommodation and case management.



4. Access to accommodation and support for animal and human DFV victim-survivors

- Increase access to accommodation and supports for animal and human DFV victim-survivor including by building animal-friendly accommodation and establishing foster care networks. Women and children face significant barriers when trying to find accommodation for them and their animals and this prevents them leaving a violent perpetrator. Many people live with animals in regional and rural areas, including larger animals (e.g. horses, pigs) and wildlife. The whole family including the animals should be supported to stay together.

Organisations that attended the roundtable

Organisation	Region
Domestic Violence NSW	Statewide
Country Women's Association NSW	Statewide
Molonglo Support Services	Queanbeyan
Highlands Community Centres Inc.	Southern Highlands (Bowral)/ Wingecarribee Shire
Orana Support Service Inc.	Dubbo
Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre	Katoomba
Women Up North Housing Inc.	Lismore
South East Women and Children's Services (SEWACS)	Bega Valley and Eurobodalla Shires
Carrie's Place Domestic Violence and Homelessness Services Inc.	East Maitland
Clarence River DVF Specialist Service Inc.	Clarence Valley, Grafton
Peninsula Lighthouse	Central Coast
Illawarra Women's Health Centre	Illawarra
Lucy's Project	Lismore
The Women's Cottage	Richmond/Hawkesbury area
Tumut Regional Family Services Inc.	Tumut
Liberty Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Services	Port Macquarie
Kempsey Families Inc. Specialist Support Services	Kempsey
Barnardos, Western NSW	Mudgee
The Salvation Army Australia Territory	Statewide
Women's Safety NSW (WDVCAS)	Statewide
Mid Coast WDVCAS	Mid North Coast
Northern Rivers WDVCAS	Northern Rivers
Women's Centre and the Illawarra Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service	Illawarra
Department of Communities and Justice Justice, Strategy & Programs	Statewide
Women NSW, System Reform and Partnerships Strategy, Policy and Commissioning	Statewide

Politicians that attended the roundtable

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