



REPORT

The impact of the 2021 Greater Sydney COVID-19 lockdown on specialist domestic and family violence services, and their clients

Domestic Violence NSW
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Domestic Violence NSW is the peak body for over 80 specialist domestic and family violence services in New South Wales, Australia. Domestic Violence NSW provides a representative and advocacy function for specialist services and the women, families and communities they support.

www.dvnsw.org.au

Recommendations- Immediate

1. Fund an emergency COVID-19 support package to enable specialist domestic and family violence services to meet increased demand.
2. Increase the base funding for specialist domestic and family violence services so they are equipped to cope with the ongoing demand caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Create a whole-of-government plan to meet the increased demand for sexual, domestic and family violence services after lockdown is lifted.
4. Increase community awareness campaigns on how to access to domestic and family violence services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Provide priority vaccination for specialist domestic and family violence staff and their clients.
6. Increase brokerage funding for specialist domestic and family violence services to assist clients with essentials such as furniture.
7. Provide additional funding to specialist domestic and family violence services for essential COVID-19 cleaning and disinfection.
8. Provide Child Safe training and resources to specialist domestic and family violence workers.

Recommendations- Medium-term

1. That the NSW Government lobby the Federal government for increased income support for people on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence.
2. Increase supports for women on temporary visas, refugee and migrant victim-survivors in NSW.
3. Increase funding to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) by 20%.
4. Increase the number of social housing properties in NSW by 5,000 per year.
5. Provide additional and ongoing, evidence-based training for police on sexual, domestic and family violence.

The survey

- Between 20th and 28th of July 2021, 78 out of 88 Domestic Violence NSW member services completed a survey on the impacts of the 2021 Greater Sydney COVID-19 lockdown on specialist domestic and family violence services, and their clients (victim-survivors of domestic and family violence). The survey aimed to provide the first holistic picture of how services and their clients have been impacted. This report presents the findings of the survey and the resulting recommendations for the NSW government.

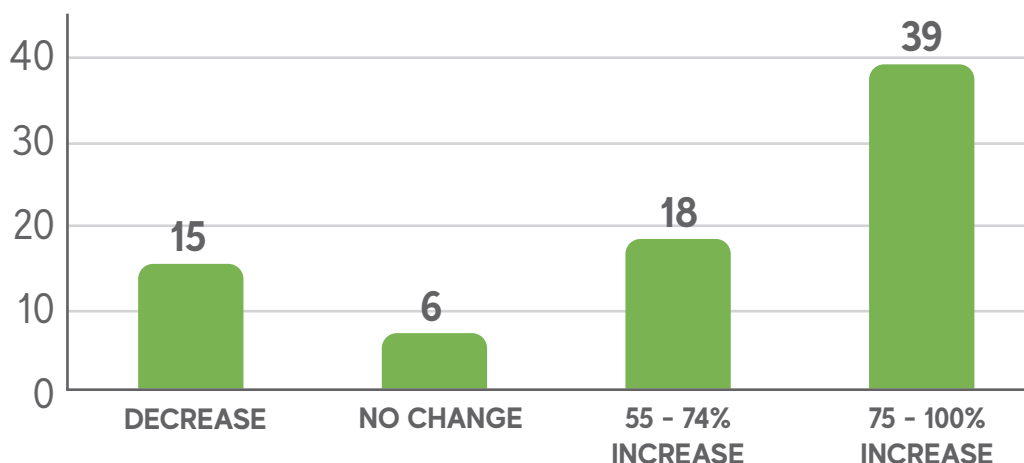
Findings

THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASED DEMAND ON SERVICES AND HEIGHTENED COMPLEXITY OF CASES

- 73% of services said they have seen an increase in demand (n=57), with 50% of services seeing an increase in demand from between 75-100% (n=39).
- Concerningly, 15 services noted that there had been a decrease in demand for service indicating that in some areas people are finding it difficult to access support, especially during lockdown.

Note: these figures are an estimate only based on figures provided by the services. Services were not required to compare service data sets.

How have referrals/ demand been impacted by the recent COVID19 lockdown?



- Despite the increased demand, funding granted during the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak has ceased for many services and they have lost staff.
- A lack of long-term funding makes it difficult to secure staff, and hiring in regional/rural areas is extremely difficult.

"Compliance management takes extra time from management staff."

"Funding from last lockdown has ceased and so we have lost multiple staff. It needs to be refunded."

"Urgently require additional staff and capacity in many areas."

"Noting from last time that there will be a surge after lockdown and we need to plan for that."

"DV Refuges desperately need funding for more staff to cope with demand and reduce the number of women we are unable to help."

"[We need] COVID money to cover the extra work as the last round has finished and that reduces our workers by eight."

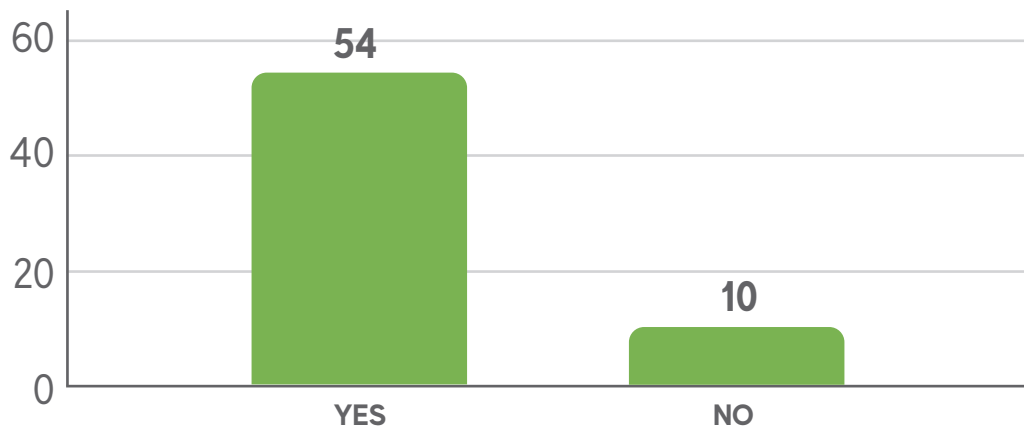
"We have experienced an increase in monthly referrals this year of between 24-172% compared to 2019 pre-COVID. Current funding to increase staff to cater is only to March 2022 and we are starting to struggle even with this increase. Very concerned about what will happen after March 2022 as even if demand returns to 'normal' these additional clients will still need support post March."

INCREASE IN COMPLEX CASEWORK

- 84% of services said there was an increase in the complexity of the situations for the clients referred (n=54).
- Additional funding to services will be required to enable services to support clients under the challenging circumstances of COVID19.

"Clients [are] having to stay longer in [the] shelter due to complexities and lack of other options."

Since the 2021 COVID lockdown commenced our service has seen more complexity in the types of referrals and abuse?

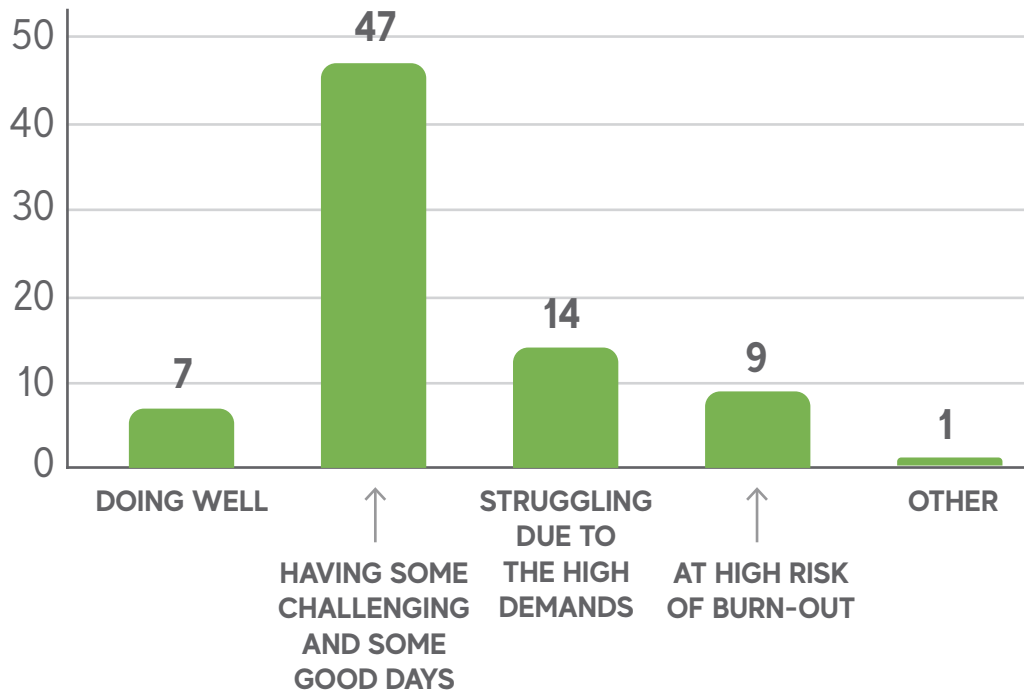


STAFF BURN OUT AND TURNOVER

- The majority of specialist domestic and family violence workers appear to be doing well (n=54, 69%), however nearly a third (29%) are struggling due to high demand or at risk of burn out (n=23).
- Just over 10% of services said their workers were at high risk of burn out (11.5%, n=9).
- Some managers noted high worker turn-over in their services.

Lack of long-term funding security can also lead to high worker turn-over. This was evident in member feedback on staff retention rates across 2020.

Since the 2021 COVID Lockdown workers at my service are:



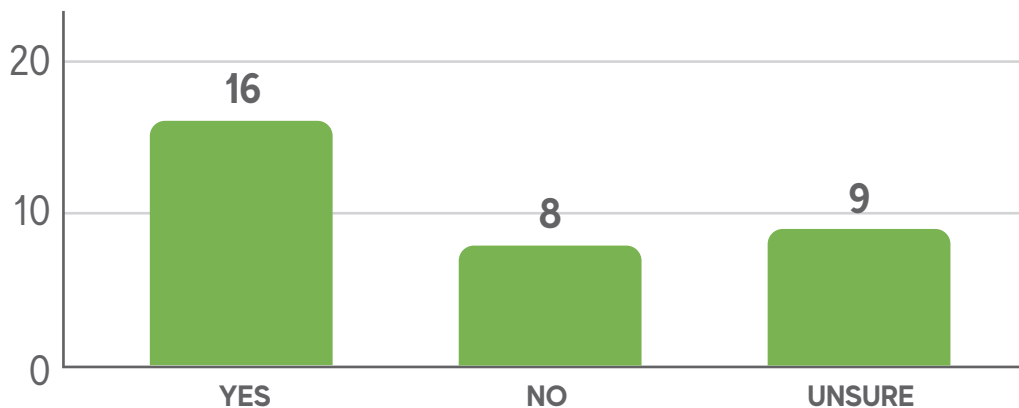
INCREASE IN THE LENGTH OF WAITLISTS IS IMPACTING SERVICE PROVISION

- Of the 33 services operating waitlists, there had been an increase in the length of the waitlist of almost half of the services (n=16, 48.5%).
- There had not been an increase to waiting lists in eight services, and nine respondents were unsure as to whether or not there had been an increase in the waitlist.

"We have had to close our waitlist at times as we could not take more clients. Staff shortages have impacted this decision as well."

"We closed our books for six weeks recently, which would equate to approximately 50 high risk families not receiving support."

Has the wait list increased since COVID lockdown June 21?



1. Fund an emergency COVID-19 support package to enable specialist domestic and family violence services to meet increased demand.
2. Increase the base funding for specialist domestic and family violence services so they are equipped to cope with the ongoing demand caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Create a whole-of-government plan to meet the increased demand for sexual, domestic and family violence services after lockdown is lifted.
4. Increase community awareness campaigns on how to access to domestic and family violence services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

LACK OF ACCESS TO VACCINATION FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS

DVNSW members were concerned about the lack of access for specialist workers to vaccinations. Similarly, the lack of access for clients makes it challenging to support as many clients, for example due to the need for a negative test result before attending a refuge, and some refuges accommodating less clients to support social distancing.

"Vulnerable clients and frontline staff are not being prioritised for vaccinations. Appointments are not available until October in many areas."

5. Provide priority vaccination for specialist domestic and family violence staff and their clients.

THERE IS A NEED FOR FLEXIBLE BROKERAGE FUNDING

- There are challenges for specialist domestic and family violence services accessing supports for material aid, as many services are closed (e.g. second hand furniture shops), and there is insufficient funding to purchase new items.
- Challenges accessing material aid links to the demonstrated increase in client complexity.

"Ability to obtain beds and fridges and essential items for women who have managed to get a rental property, when most places are closed."

6. Increase brokerage funding for specialist domestic and family violence services to assist clients with essentials such as furniture.

SERVICES REPORT INADEQUATE FUNDING TO SUPPORT NECESSARY CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

- Although services receive additional funding for cleaning, this only covers refuges. They may also (if homelessness services) have a permanent premises which they rent and also often have to clean other spaces such as cars, offices etc. This cleaning of other areas is not being subsidised.

7. Provide additional funding to specialist domestic and family violence services for essential COVID-19 cleaning and disinfection.

CLIENTS AND VICTIM SURVIVORS ARE FACING INCREASED MENTAL HEALTH STRESS

- DVNSW have noted the increased stress on the mental health of people experiencing domestic and family violence due to the COVID19 pandemic.
- DVNSW are encouraged by the additional funding to mental health services in the state and federal 2021 budgets, and believe this should remain an investment priority.

"Mental health issues [for clients] are concerning."

"I have noticed that many victims of Domestic Violence are experiencing a decline in their mental health due to the lockdown as it limits their ability to see their loved ones."

"Clients reporting that they are struggling much more than the last lockdown, especially in terms of mental health."

CONCERNS FOR CHILDREN AS VICTIM-SURVIVORS ARE PRELEVANT

- During the 2020 lockdown, there was a large concern for the wellbeing of children, with Risk Of Significant Harm (ROSH) reports reducing during the lockdown period. A concerted effort is required to maintain the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Specialist domestic and family violence services need support and training to ensure they are continuing to practice in a child-safe manner.
- <https://www.ocg.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/training-and-resources/child-safe-elearning>

"The lack of awareness of domestic and family violence that children are experiencing, and that they are experiencing all forms of domestic and family violence, just like other women and victims."

"Working with children online. Younger children (under 10 years old) seem to be less able to access online services. I would like to modify my service so I can continue working with/supporting my younger clients."

8. Urgently provide Child Safe training and resources to specialist domestic and family violence workers.

WOMEN ON TEMPORARY VISAS ARE FACING ADDITIONAL BARRIERS TO SUPPORT

- In the 2020 lockdown, there were significant concerns for victim-survivors of domestic violence on temporary visas, as well as new migrants. Although there have been extra provisions made to access crisis accommodation, more is needed to support vulnerable women and their children with no income due to their visa status.

"There is a lack of funding support for clients on no income."

"Current lack of resources for CALD clients who have been in the country less than four years to access financial support."

9. That the NSW Government lobby the Federal government for increased income support for people on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence.
10. Increase supports for women on temporary visas, refugee and migrant victim-survivors in NSW.

EXISTING HOUSING ISSUES FOR VICTIM-SURVIVORS ARE EXACERBATED BY COVID RESTRICTIONS

- There remains a lack of crisis, temporary and social housing, this has been exacerbated by COVID-19.
- It is harder for people to couch surf due to restrictions, and concern over elderly parents' wellbeing.
- Regional rental markets are tight and in some cases inaccessible due to people from Sydney moving regionally.

"Massive influx of people moving to regional NSW from Sydney putting more pressure on land impacting local rental market. Women unable to leave DV due to inability to access affordable housing."

"Lack of accommodation for large families, and families with male children over 12."

"We are receiving inappropriate referrals due to reduced capacity in the crisis, homeless and mental health services."

"A lot of referrals for women and children fleeing DFV seeking accommodation who are still in the home with the perpetrator. Usually they leave before contacting our service."

11. Increase funding to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) by 20%.
12. Increase the number of social housing properties in NSW by 5,000 per year.

COMMUNITIES ARE HAVING ISSUES WITH POLICE RESPONSES

- DVNSW has received feedback from services in the locked-down Local Government Areas that issues with over-policing are prevalent, that some police are not consulting with all the community leaders, and that they are issuing fines as a 'one size fits all response', without taking into account extenuating circumstances.
- Best-practice policing of domestic and family violence remains a challenge, and short, medium and long-term solutions are needed to ensure high quality and tailor led responses across NSW (see the DVNSW Submission to the NSW Inquiry into Coercive Control, January 2021).

"Still having major issues with police (general duties) on front desk taking statements, not using interpreter services and turning women away (with black eye)."

13. Provide additional and ongoing, evidence-based training for police on sexual, domestic and family violence.

About DVNSW

Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW. We have over 80 member organisations across NSW. We work to improve policy, legislative and program responses to DFV (DFV) and to eliminate DFVDFV through advocacy, partnerships and promoting good practice.

DVNSW members represent the diversity of specialist services working in NSW to support women, families and communities impacted by DFV. They are non-government-funded organisations. Our member organisations include: crisis and refuge services, transitional accommodation and community housing providers, family support services, Aboriginal controlled organisations and specialist CALD organisations, specialist homelessness service providers, men's behaviour change programs and networks, community organisations working with high risk communities, specialist women's legal support services, women and children's support services, and Safe at Home programs.

DVNSW acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation upon whose lands DVNSW works. We pay respects to elders, past, present and emerging.

