

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES REVIEW

DVNSW Submission

March 2022



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Acknowledgement

This report was written on the unceded lands of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Domestic Violence NSW would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the breadth and depth of Australia. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived and cared for Country for over 65,000 years and continue to do so, honouring ancestors and knowledge holders within community, and observing ancient cultural practices.

We concede that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are at the highest risk of sexual, family and domestic violence compared with other women in Australia. We acknowledge that sexual, domestic and family violence are not part of Aboriginal culture. We at Domestic Violence NSW works to position ourselves as allies, to walk alongside, to listen, to give our voice and strength, to respect, to never forget and to learn from past mistakes.

We would like to recognise the impacts of colonisation and the ongoing systemic racism and oppression that is still present within institutions and the broader community. We acknowledge the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and hold their stories with great care.



About Domestic Violence NSW

Domestic Violence NSW is the **peak body for specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services in NSW**.

Domestic Violence NSW has over 130 member organisations across NSW. We work to improve policy, legislative and program responses to domestic and family violence and to eliminate domestic and family violence through advocacy, partnerships and promoting good practice.

Domestic Violence NSW members represent the diversity of specialist services working in NSW to support women, families and communities impacted by domestic and family violence. They are non-government-funded organisations.

Member organisations include: crisis and refuge services, transitional accommodation and community housing providers, family support services, Aboriginal controlled organisations and specialist Culturally and Linguistically Diverse 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's health centres, women and children's support services, and Safe at Home programs.

Overview

Domestic Violence NSW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Women's Economic Opportunities Review. This submission from Domestic Violence NSW focuses on the crucial need for investing in a **workforce development strategy for the female dominated specialist domestic and family violence sector** which is currently experiencing a skills shortage.

In 2017, one in four workers in community service organisations in NSW were aged 55 or over (Cortis & Blaxland, 2017). In the domestic and family violence sector, workers were from an even older cohort with approximately half of the staff being of retirement age by 2027 (Cortis & Blaxland, 2017).

The COVID 19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing workforce issues for a female dominated, under-resourced sector. Demand for services has increased, workers have been stretched and at higher risk of burn-out (Risse & Jackson, 2021). Services face challenges recruiting and retaining Aboriginal specialist workers and hiring in regional, rural and remote areas.

This submission is endorsed by Women's Health NSW. Domestic Violence NSW endorses the submission of Women's Legal Service NSW.

A workforce development strategy for the specialist domestic and family violence sector in NSW: Recommendations:

1. **Fund the development of a ten-year workforce strategy** for the specialist domestic and family violence sector in NSW that includes:
 - a. Specific strategies for attracting and retaining skilled and qualified staff.
 - b. A particular focus on supporting employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.
 - c. A particular focus on skills development and recruitment and retainment in regional and rural areas.
 - d. Employment pathways for victim-survivors who wish to enter the workforce.
2. **Fund training for current specialist domestic and family violence sector** employees in trauma and gendered violence-informed practice, cultural safety and awareness, risk and compliance, violence prevention, health and wellbeing, and how to counter the impact of vicarious trauma.
3. **Expand funding to the specialist domestic and family violence sector** to increase salaries so they are commensurate with the complexity of the work, the skills required and the impact of vicarious trauma and burnout. Increased funding would also assist providers to hire additional staff and consequently reduce workloads to a realistic level.
4. **Support skill development for up to 80 new graduates** to enter the specialist domestic and family violence workforce, gain employment and develop the skills to work in this specialist field.

Why we need a workforce development strategy

A state-based, workforce development strategy for the specialist domestic and family violence sector must investigate current skill shortages exacerbated by the COVID 19 Pandemic, identify barriers to attracting and retaining skilled workers and include a professional development framework.

The NSW social sector (community services workforce) provides essential care and support to over one million people each year – including those impacted by poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, mental health challenges, disability, or other complex issues (Equity Economics, 2021). Research from Equity Economics (2021) suggests the NSW social sector will demand an additional 62,000 jobs by 2030, including 27,000 in regional NSW. This will create a **significant need for skilled specialist domestic and family violence workers.**

The community services workforce remains strongly female dominated. Many workers are approaching retirement age, especially in small organisations, and employment is characterised by high rates of part time and casual employment. Staff recruitment and retention is particularly challenging in regional and rural areas.

A report by the Social Policy Research Centre (Cortis & Blaxland, 2017) on workforce issues in the community services sector found that:

- On average, **77.6% of staff in community services are women**, with higher rates in the domestic and family violence sector.
- One in four workers in community service organisations are aged 55 or over, with an older cohort in the domestic and family violence sector where **approximately half of the staff will be of retirement age by 2027.**
- Very small organisations reported higher proportions of older staff. In organisations with five or fewer staff, one in three workers are 55 or older, and very few staff are aged under 25.

Specialist domestic and family violence workers provide crisis responses and case management to victim survivors of family violence. The services are female-dominated and large employers of women. They promote victim survivor safety whilst navigating the complex network of the social service and family violence systems. Their work includes risk assessment and management, including risks posed by perpetrators of domestic and family violence. Many workers in the sector have personally experienced domestic and family violence, and training pathways are needed for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence to work as specialists.

Effectively responding to domestic and family violence, sexual violence and men's violence is specialist work which requires certified training and continual skill development to ensure quality service delivery. Professional development in the specialist domestic and family violence sector urgently needs to be addressed. For example, current areas of professional development need in the sector include trauma and gender-informed practice, non-fatal strangulation and technology-facilitated abuse.

The COVID Pandemic has impacted the domestic and family violence workforce in a variety of ways, including increased demand for service and a higher risk of mental health distress, burnout and attrition among the predominantly female workforce (Risse & Jackson, 2021). Government policy

responses have predominantly supported male-dominated sectors, offering an opportunity to turn support towards a sector such as specialist domestic and family violence specialist workers.

Released in 2016, the NSW Government *Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021: Safer Lives for Women, Men and Children* (Ministry of Health, 2016) began the work of assessing the workforce development needs of the sector but did not finalise a workforce strategy. NSW has committed to implementing target 13 under Closing the Gap as well as initiatives under the next National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children. A thorough workforce development plan is necessary to be able to meet NSW's National commitments.

In response to the need to support women's participation in the workforce -

Domestic Violence NSW seeks the opportunity to work with the Expert Reference Panel, the NSW Council for Women's Economic Opportunity and NSW Treasury to develop a comprehensive state-based workforce development strategy for the rapidly ageing and female dominated specialist domestic and family violence sector in NSW.

Outcomes

- The needs of a fast growing, female dominated workforce in NSW are addressed.
- The risk of impending skills shortages in the specialist domestic and family violence sector due to an aging workforce are mitigated.
- Increased employment opportunities for women.
- Improved recruitment and retention of skilled and qualified staff.
- Reduced workplace injuries related to vicarious trauma and burnout.
- Increased job and training opportunities for workers in regional and rural NSW.
- Increased number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified workers across the sector, and increased retention of Aboriginal focussed workers.
- High quality supports to domestic and family violence are ensured across NSW with a trained workforce, increasing the safety of women, children and families.
- The gender pay gap is reduced, by ensuring that this female dominated industry have salaries and pay scales commensurate with male dominated industries.
- NSW meets its targets to reduce domestic and family violence under Closing the Gap and the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children.
- Women who have experienced domestic and family violence have increased employment pathways.

Stronger Communities Cluster State Outcomes supported by this funding:

- **Children and families thrive:** ensuring the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable, children, young people and families, and protecting them from the risk of harm, abuse and neglect (State Outcome 2)
- **Efficient and effective legal system:** Resolving matters through legal services, the administration of courts and tribunals, and client-facing justice services to victims and vulnerable people (State Outcome 3)

- **People have a safe and affordable place to live:** Assisting people who are unable to access or maintain appropriate housing, including homelessness services (State Outcome 4)
- **Reduce reoffending:** Operating the State’s corrections system, including support for, and management of, adult and juvenile offenders in correctional centres and the community (State Outcome 6)
- **Safer communities:** Preventing, detecting and investigating crime; maintaining social order and community safety; promoting road safety and supporting emergency management (State Outcome 7).

Funding requirement

- \$150,000 to develop a ten-year workforce development strategy.
- Increase the current \$90 million per year investment in specialist domestic violence services to \$135 million per year to support victim-survivors recover and re-join the economy and to increase employment in this growing sector.
- \$1.2 million to support up to 80 new graduates to receive training and development in domestic and family violence.
- \$2 million annually to provide additional training and skill development opportunities to the current workforce.
- Support the Male Family Violence Intervention sector’s workforce development through an investment of \$3.8 million (see Not to Violence NSW Pre-Budget submission 2022).

References

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