

## Principles for Specialist Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) refuges in NSW

**This is a short issues paper prepared by Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) to inform policy decisions by the NSW Government. The paper is aimed to promote further research and consultation towards creating high quality policy framing for the 75 new refuges announced in October 2021.**

### Outcomes

- DVNSW believe that DCJ should clarify the central outcome for the funding so that the future direction can be built and measured against it.
- Variations in outcomes include number of beds, number of beds for people from marginalised groups, unit cost and people housed.
- DVNSW see the central outcome of this funding as an opportunity to increase the level of quality and accessibility of specialist homelessness services across the sector.

### Contracting and Procurement

- DVNSW suggest that alternative options to competitive tendering are explored. For example, Regional Office DCJ and Land and Housing Corporation (LACH) could facilitate a process for proposals at a local level alongside a third party who could assess DFV specialisation.
- DVNSW hold concerns regarding the impact of competitive tendering, particularly in regional areas, but broadly across the sector. Competitive tendering has over the last decade created barriers and competition for funding in the Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) sector rather than a collaborative approach. There is ongoing division and mistrust in the sector because of the Going Home Staying Home (GSHS) reforms.
- Consultation with domestic and family violence services as the procurement journey commences is essential to ensure decisions are informed, relevant and safe.
- DCJ should prioritise existing specialist DFV services that currently manage refuges – ensuring they can demonstrate good outcomes for clients, followed by specialist services managing non-residential services.
- All tiers of housing should be eligible to be contracted for the new services.
- Transparency is essential in contracting building/developers, ensuring DFV refuge standards are met.
- Fragmentation risks need to be considered and planned for.
- Local led projects strengthen community cohesion, and relevant homelessness peaks will be essential to bring them all together to share experiences.

- There will need to be clarity on timed allocation of funding. Funds available for restricted periods (e.g. 12 months) are prohibitive for long-term goals and sustainability of services for people in need.

### **Principles to support specialisation**

- DVNSW believes in the integral nature of specialisation in providing evidence-based, high-quality responses to DFV. DFV is a complex and nuanced issue and requires professionals with specific expertise to respond well.
- Under the Going Home Staying Home (GSHS) reforms, specialisation was lost, in preference for more generalist responses leading to a loss of specialised workers and expertise in the sector.
- Specialists will be essential in both the planning and implementation phases of this project.
- Consideration will be needed on what evidence constitutes for specialisation. DVNSW believe establishing this will be crucial for the process and would welcome input. DCJ should explore what can be measured and assessed through consultation with experts and the sector.
- Minimum standards for specialist DFV services (as advocated by DVNSW), if implemented in NSW, will support the contracting process. ASES accreditation for minimum standards (in all SHS contracts). DVNSW can support this process based on the development of the DVNSW Good Practice Guidelines: <https://www.dvnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DFV-Practice-Guidelines-1.pdf> (soon to be re-released as a 2022 version).
- We recommend there be refuges for specific cohorts e.g. for young people, migrant women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, trans and gender diverse women to provide high-quality results.

### **Transparency and consultation**

- Specialist services need to be included in consultation at every stage of process (Site selection, design and construction, and establishment and operations).
- Transparency will also be key to the successful implementation of these reforms.
- DVNSW suggest implementing a project advisory group including government and NGO representatives as well as regional implementation groups including specialist DFV service representation.
- People with lived experience should be included in the advisory panel and consulted.
- DVNSW and Homelessness NSW should be resourced to keep the sector informed and be involved where appropriate.
- A consultation plan should be created and co-designed with the sector. DVNSW suggest partnering with a university who can facilitate collaboration sessions with specialists, advisory groups, people with lived experience of working and/or living in refuge accommodation, construction experts, quantity surveyors.

### **Utilising funding to increase temporary accommodation**

- Temporary accommodation remains an important asset to respond to people experiencing DFV.
- DVNSW suggest DCJ consider the Nowra model operated by SAHSSI, where a property is run by a DFV service for temporary accommodation rather than 3-month, refuge style accommodation.
- DVNSW members suggest victim-survivors are concerned about the quality of temporary accommodation, and in the experience of DVNSW members, frequently want safer refuge accommodation rather than temporary accommodation.
- It would be ideal to offer safe solutions for people experiencing violence who only need 1-6 days of accommodation to get back on their feet.
- This model would have a cost benefit to government over subsidising private temporary accommodation when re-entering the service system is considered in economic modelling.

### **Geographic location of refuges**

- DCJ should agree to principles for how the locations are decided on, for example, based on established community need.
- DVNSW suggest not allocating who will run the refuges at this stage, rather geographical location based on need. Land and Housing should purchase properties, rather than housing them on the lands of other organisations with property e.g. large charities. This allows flexibility and transparency regarding which organisations will run the facilities. In circumstances where this is not possible, DVNSW support broadening land acquisition to local councils but not to NGOs.
- Base allocation on demand and need, access to housing, population and projected growth.
- We recommend not basing allocation solely on expanding current contracts.
- Regional areas must be prioritised and included - regional areas have low affordability and access to housing due to the increase in people from Sydney moving to regional areas. Service location should increase the spread of services state-wide and decrease the need for families to re-locate where safe and possible.
- DVNSW can support mapping need through surveying members.
- Data to consider: BOCSAR stats, WDVCA unit demand stats, Google stats, Link2Home data, temporary accommodation usage and demand, rental affordability.
- Further demand information could be measured by SHS services and turn away statistics. Services are currently not formally collecting this information to our knowledge. SHS Services should have a way of triaging clients and ensuring there is no wrong door for clients. DCJ could include this in SHS CIMS data collected.
- Consider being more explicit around geographical locations particularly rural and remote – any considerations for Aboriginal families/large families; also need to be built not just near local but also have wraparound services available.
- Consider neighbours and ensuring a supportive community environment.

## **Workforce development**

- Workforce development needs to be planned very soon, to enable sufficient staffing levels for refuges, particularly, noting that there is an aging workforce in the DFV sector, with approximately half of the staff of retirement age in the next 10 years.
- There is also a high turnover due to vicarious trauma and delays in new students due to COVID-19 disruptions to learning.
- Attracting the workforce is going to be essential and needed as part of planning.
- Consideration is also needed on the basis of not all universities and TAFE programs having a violence against women stream. Many DFV services have not had capacity to provide on the job internships/student placements due to COVID-19 again impacting the amount of social workers and DFV workers being attracted to the DFV space.
- The Education Centre Against Violence has not had full training capacity due to COVID-19.
- To be successful, the new housing will need adequate funding for staff, recognising specialist skills.
- Ongoing training will also be required including training pathways for existing staff in the social sector with valuable experience and limited qualifications.
- Consider staffing issues in regional/remote communities – may need to incentivize relocation, and may need to house staff in refuge due to lack of available housing.

## **Initial specifications to consider for new crisis accommodation – (further consultation required)**

Note: Clarity is needed on what research has been done to understand why Core and Cluster is considered best practice for NSW and whether it is the best approach for all 75 new refuges.

- The main benefit of the core & cluster model is that it's more accessible to diverse needs. Allows for access to support services and community support, while giving choice of when to engage (self-containment of apartments is essential). However, peer support and increased safety are benefits of the shared model.
- Flexibility of housing is key, to ensure adaptability to various cohorts.
- Ensure consistency among refuges so that victim-survivors have access to a similar quality of crisis accommodation across NSW.
- Consider proximity to wrap around services or purpose-built buildings that can facilitate multi agency support *and* short-term refuge, as well as amenities such as health, education and transport etc.
- Disability and special needs:
  - Wheelchair access is important, but needs to be accessible for all users and people with other forms of disability.
  - Adjustable kitchen benchtops.
  - Flexibility and adjustability of design
  - Adjustability across core and cluster
  - Including a variety of disabilities.

- Consider working with People with Disability Australia (PWDA) to develop
- Helpful resource developed by DVNSW and PWDA: [30 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR SERVICE MORE ACCESSIBLE \(dvnsw.org.au\)](https://www.dvnsw.org.au/resources/30-ways-to-make-your-service-more-accessible)
- For young people/children, yards are important for children to play, playroom, dedicated study areas for young people.
- Trauma informed designs and modifications- including colour selection, safety features, no narrow or enclosed spaces, windows in all counselling rooms.
- Accommodation suitable for companion animals.
- Environmentally sustainable.
- Ensure sufficient funding for landscaping.
- Consider a mix between single women and women and children's refuges.
- Include modular options for larger families.
- Include options for specific single women's accommodation, older women, and women on short term visas – culturally appropriate/ connected to community.
- Include AVL room.
- Include sleep-over room.
- Consider sufficient staff facilities.
- Maximum noise-control.
- Access to daylight and natural ventilation is vital to maintain calm within the refuge environment and is essential for healing; creating a sense of place and connection to the landscape, shown to be important in building a sense of hope.
- Sensory gardens and children's planting areas can be integrated on-site, with therapeutic benefits. In-between spaces, like window-seats or study nooks, enable clients to be social without having to be central, important for those who have experienced trauma, and for those who need time to heal, but also need to connect.
- Consult with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people/services** on how this funding can help support Target 13 of the Closing the Gap Report. Due to the high statistics on Aboriginal women experiencing DFV and low statistics on seeking mainstream refuges, this needs to be addressed. Preference for Aboriginal Controlled Organisations to run services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will be important. Further, built on country, culturally appropriate and managed by an Aboriginal service.
- **For Aboriginal families** – consider LACH's presentation regarding supporting Aboriginal clients and new Core and Cluster refuges.
  - What works well in existing refuges for Aboriginal families?
  - What are the challenges facing Aboriginal families in existing refuges? (This could include accessibility issues i.e. location, distance, connection to community i.e. perpetrator family/family disconnect, no other Aboriginal families in refuge for support)
  - What spaces (i.e. bedrooms sizes including types of beds, lounge room, bathroom, backyard suitable for pets/kids etc.) need special consideration to accommodate Aboriginal families in refuges?

- What are the key areas refugees need to address and implement to become more culturally competent when supporting Aboriginal families? (Could include ensuring all policies and procedures are culturally inclusive and competent, onsite non-Aboriginal staff are culturally competent/undertaken appropriate training, appropriate artwork, having Aboriginal staff available to assist)

**Suggested implementation stages- high level**

Stage	Timeframe	Key activities
One	Oct-Dec 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desktop review of good design principles for trauma-informed refuge design</li> <li>• Draft implementation plan</li> <li>• Consult with peaks on draft implementation plan</li> <li>• Map current need to assess locations of new refuges</li> <li>• Work with LAHC re: contractors and land acquisition</li> <li>• Partner with a Design/Architecture Faculty at a University for best practice design e.g. UTS Design Innovation Research Centre</li> <li>• Establish project advisory group at state level</li> </ul>
Two	Jan-June 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider partnering with peak bodies or a university to manage sector consultations</li> <li>• Work with Design/Architecture Faculty to begin scoping for design and manage consultation on design features</li> <li>• Consult with peaks, sector and people with lived expertise regarding specifications for housing models</li> <li>• Consult with sector on project outcomes and specialisation</li> <li>• Consult with peaks regarding refuge locations</li> <li>• Work with LAHC re: contractors, land acquisition and finalising designs for Core and Cluster models</li> <li>• Establish local advisory groups at regional levels</li> <li>• Building commences</li> <li>• Finalise core and cluster models</li> <li>• Begin drafting workforce development plan</li> <li>• Consult with organisations representing marginalised groups re: specialisation, accessibility etc.</li> </ul>
Three	July-Dec 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with peaks on workforce development plan, finalise and begin implementation</li> <li>• Amend implementation plan based on sector consultation</li> <li>• Develop contract plan (e.g. tender, regional allocation etc.)</li> </ul>
Four	Jan-June 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft evaluation plan</li> <li>• Draft contracts and consult on draft contracts</li> </ul>
Five	July- Dec 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to consult on the above</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to implement the above</li> </ul>
Six	Jan- June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing is contracted</li> <li>• Housing is furnished and decorated in a trauma-informed manner</li> <li>• Housing is staffed</li> </ul>
Seven	July- Dec 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing is operational for clients</li> </ul>