

Domestic Violence NSW position statement on a Royal Commission into domestic and family violence in NSW

Our position

- Domestic Violence NSW does not oppose a Royal Commission, but not before securing the funding the domestic and family violence sector urgently needs.
- Domestic Violence NSW is calling for an immediate investment in frontline domestic and family violence services; in violence prevention; and in transitional, social, and affordable housing in the upcoming NSW Budget 2024-25.
- Domestic Violence recommends an expert review of existing domestic and family violence plans and strategies in NSW and including recommendations from previous inquiries that have yet to be implemented.
- Domestic Violence NSW is calling for reforms of key aspects of the judicial system that would increase safety for victims of domestic and family violence.

Overview

We know that domestic and family violence can result in death. In Australia, on average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner ([ANROWS 2018](#)).

We know that children and young people are victims of domestic and family violence with long-term impacts for their health, wellbeing, and education ([AIFS 2015](#)).

We know that domestic and family violence can include violence and intimidation, emotional abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, systems abuse and other coercive and controlling behaviours ([NSW Government 2024](#)).

We know that men are more commonly the perpetrators of physical violence, sexual harassment, and sexual violence ([ABS 2023](#)).

In NSW, domestic and family violence has a wide-ranging impact on our communities and on the NSW economy and State Budget including justice, corrections, police, health, housing, homelessness, community services, education, women, and child protection.

The specialist domestic and family violence service sector is at the frontline of responding to domestic and family violence in NSW. As the peak body representing over 180 member services, Domestic Violence NSW is the voice for frontline services responding to women and children experiencing violence every day. In 50 years of action against gendered violence, the specialist domestic and family violence sector knows what works to address the violence in NSW.

The issues

1. A Royal Commission into domestic and family violence in NSW

Domestic Violence NSW does not oppose a Royal Commission. A Royal Commission has the potential to shine a spotlight on key systemic failures, give a voice to lived experts and sector experts, to provide a systematic and in-depth review of the entire domestic and family violence system, and to advise on priority reforms. However, there are several important considerations:

i. Risk of delays

It is not uncommon for inquiries of this nature to be used by governments to create the appearance of action, whilst failing to fund and implement the recommendations. Domestic Violence NSW is concerned that a Royal Commission in NSW could mean a two-year wait before we see increased

government investment. In that time, another 100 women will die. Why wait for the recommendations of a Royal Commission when the NSW Government can address the critical shortages and gaps in responding to the domestic and family violence TODAY?

ii. Funds diverted away from frontline services

In a tight fiscal environment with limited available funding in NSW, if it is a choice between diverting funding to a Royal Commission or an immediate injection of urgently needed funding, Domestic Violence NSW wants the NSW Government to commit to funding the investment priorities of the [Domestic Violence NSW 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission](#) in the NSW 2024-25 Budget.

iii. Lack of bipartisan commitment to fund and implement recommendations

The Victorian Royal Commission led to significant, long-term structural reform and there is no doubt this level of reform is needed in NSW. But before NSW can embark on this process, the specialist domestic and family violence sector needs to be assured of a bipartisan commitment to fully implement the recommendations of a Royal Commission. Victoria has invested more than \$3.86 billion since their Royal Commission. Is there bipartisan commitment in NSW to this same level of investment?

iv. Previous inquiries and existing strategies, recommendations, and research

The NSW Government already has strategies, plans and recommendations from multiple consultations and inquiries outlining what needs to be done to ensure women, children and young people in NSW are safe from violence. Given that extensive research and expert recommendations already exist, what is now needed is the political will to prioritise and fund the implementation of these recommendations.

We are asking that the NSW Government fully fund its own commitments and recommendations under the:

- [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032](#), the [First Action Plan \(2023-2027\)](#), the [First Action Plan Activities Addendum](#), and the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025](#).
- [Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control Report 1/57 - June 2021](#).
- [NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027](#).
- [NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027](#).
- [Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Review of NSW Police Force responses to domestic and family violence incidents, June 2023](#)
- NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024-2027 (draft, not yet public).
- NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Strategy (draft, not yet public).
- [NSW Health Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Domestic and Family Violence 2021-2026](#).
- [NSW Women's Strategy 2023-2026](#).
- [Closing the Gap](#), Target 13: to reduce the incidence of domestic and family violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls by 50% by 2031, headed towards 0.

v. An expert panel to advise the NSW Premier

Domestic Violence NSW notes that fully funding and implementing the strategies and plans listed above is a good start in the response to gendered violence, however, we suggest that these plans, particularly the current [NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027](#), do not go far enough to respond to the crisis of domestic and family violence and do not have adequate funding. The [NSW Action Plan](#) under the [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032](#) similarly does not go far enough to stop women and children being murdered in NSW.

A viable alternative to a costly and time-consuming Royal Commission in NSW is the appointment of an expert panel that will bring Government representatives together with lived experts and sector experts to advise the Government on priority reforms and investment. An expert panel could review and collate the commitments and recommendations across all NSW strategies and plans, and recommendations that are yet to be implemented from previous inquiries undertaken in NSW. In addition, the expert panel could review inquiries that have been undertaken in other jurisdictions, including the Victoria Royal Commission into Family Violence, to identify recommendations that would be relevant and beneficial in NSW.

However, the allocation of urgent funding to the domestic and family violence sector should occur immediately, rather than waiting for the advice of the expert panel.

2. An urgent need for immediate investment in the domestic and family violence sector in NSW

Year after year, successive NSW Governments fail to invest in the [funding priorities of Domestic Violence NSW](#) and the 180 frontline specialist services we represent.

Comparison of budget figures show that NSW invested almost \$200 million less compared to Victoria in the 2022-23 financial year (\$417.2 million compared to \$613 million), despite our larger population. In modelling figures for NCOSS, [Impact Economics and Policy](#) indicated that the NSW Government would need to increase funding by \$500 million a year to close the per capita funding gap with Victoria.

Domestic Violence NSW seeks immediate and substantial NSW Government investment to address the crisis of gendered violence against women and children in the 2024-25 NSW Budget to be released in June.

Domestic Violence NSW, on behalf of the specialist domestic and family violence sector in NSW, demands that the NSW Government:

1. Immediately increase funding for existing domestic and family violence services by \$145 million to meet current demand and an additional \$80 million to expand specialist services to respond directly to women, children and young people impacted by domestic and family violence, so nobody seeking assistance ever needs to be turned away.
2. Immediately provide \$100 million to stop the violence before it starts by releasing, funding, and implementing the NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024-2027 (\$40 million in the next 12 months, and \$20 million per annum in years two, three and four).
3. Immediately build 7,500 new social and affordable homes in NSW each year for 20 years and provide an exit pathway out of crisis refuges by building an additional 750 transitional homes for women, children and young people who have experienced domestic and family violence.
4. Immediately:

- a. Undertake a comprehensive review of court decisions, including guidelines, bench books, legislation, and cultural understandings and practices regarding domestic violence and risk factors, to ensure victim safety is consistently prioritised over perpetrator freedom in all parts of NSW.
- b. Undertake a comprehensive review of court bail and sentencing decisions in matters where women have been killed.
- c. Explore Domestic Violence Electronic Monitoring for bail, not just custodial release, as well as other potential surveillance measures.

Domestic Violence NSW's funding priorities to address domestic and family violence in NSW are comprehensively explained in the [Domestic Violence NSW 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission](#).

Recommendations

That the NSW Government:

- a. Conduct an expert review of existing domestic and family violence strategies and plans in NSW and recommendations from previous inquiries that are yet to be implemented.
- b. Immediately increase funding for existing domestic and family violence services by \$145 million to meet current demand.
- c. Immediately provide an additional \$80 million to expand specialist domestic and family violence services.
- d. Immediately provide \$100 million to stop the violence before it starts by releasing, funding, and implementing the NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024-2027 (\$40 million in the next 12 months, and \$20 million per annum in years two, three and four).
- e. Immediately build 7,500 new social and affordable homes in NSW each year for 20 years.
- f. Immediately build an additional 750 transitional homes to provide an exit pathway out of crisis refuges for women, children and young people who have experienced domestic and family violence.
- g. Immediately undertake a comprehensive review of court decisions, including guidelines, bench books, legislation, and cultural understandings of domestic violence and risk factors, to ensure victim safety is consistently prioritised over perpetrator freedom in all parts of NSW.
- h. Immediately undertake a comprehensive review of court bail and sentencing decisions in matters where women have been killed.
- i. Immediately explore Domestic Violence Electronic Monitoring for bail, not just custodial release, as well as other potential surveillance measures.

About DVNSW

[DVNSW](#) is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW. We have over 180 member organisations across NSW.

DVNSW members represent the diversity of specialist services working in NSW to support women, families and communities impacted by domestic and family violence. Our member organisations include crisis and refuge services, transitional accommodation and community housing providers,

Aboriginal controlled organisations, specialist migrant and refugee organisations, men's behaviour change programs and networks, specialist women's legal support services, women and children's support services, women's health centres and Safe at Home programs.

DVNSW works to improve policy and legislative responses to domestic and family violence and to eliminate domestic and family violence through advocacy, partnerships, and the promotion of good practice. We sit on over 85 advisory groups and committees and provide regular, informed advice to all levels of government, with a particular focus on the NSW Department of Communities and Justice. We chair the NSW Women's Alliance and are a member of the National Women's Safety Alliance and work alongside other peak organisations such as Safe and Equal in Victoria.