

We can end the violence

Domestic Violence NSW Pre-Budget Submission 2025-2026

December 2024

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About us

Domestic Violence NSW is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW. With approximately 200 member organisations across the state and diverse lived expertise advisory groups, we work to improve policy, legislative and program responses to domestic and family violence through advocacy and collaboration, while promoting good practice and primary prevention.

We exist to eliminate domestic and family violence from society.

Domestic Violence NSW members represent the diversity of NSW specialist domestic and family violence services, working to support adults, children, families and communities impacted by domestic and family violence. Our member organisations consist of services such as crisis and refuge specialist homelessness services, domestic violence response enhancement, specialist domestic and family violence case management, Aboriginal controlled organisations, migrant and refugee specialist organisations, community housing, staying home leaving violence, women's legal and women's court advocacy services, men's behaviour change programs, and general community, women and children's support programs. It's our role to ensure our members are listened to, respected and heard by the change-makers in society.

We recognise that lived experience is central to change. We understand that domestic and family violence impacts some communities disproportionately – which is why we ensure the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQA+ people, migrant and refugee people and people with disability have a central voice in our advocacy. With guidance from lived experts, we elevate the experiences, voices and needs of victim-survivors through all work we undertake.

Together with victim-survivors, our members, our partners and our team – we will end gender-based violence in NSW.

Acknowledgement

This report was written on the stolen and unceded lands of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We pay respects to the Elders past and present.

Domestic Violence NSW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first sovereign nations across the breadth and depth of Australia. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived and cared for Country for over 60,000 years and continue to do so, honouring ancestors and knowledge holders within community, and observing ancient cultural practices. We acknowledge the damaging impacts of colonisation and hold their stories with great care.

We acknowledge that domestic and family violence are not part of Aboriginal culture and assert that the responsibilities of Aboriginal families and kinship systems do not align nor are reflected in current government policies. We work to position ourselves as allies and give voice and strength to the unique position that Aboriginal and Torres Strait people hold in their own family systems and communities.



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Executive summary

Domestic and family violence can cause significant physical, emotional, psychological and financial harm to those who experience it – leading to homelessness or even death. 76 women have been reported murdered in Australia because of domestic and family violence this year, with 25 of these women being killed in NSW (Counting Dead Women Australia, 2024). This is the highest toll in nine years.

We know that domestic violence-related assault is going up three per cent per year on average (BOSCAR 2024). We know that domestic and family violence is the most common form of child abuse, impacting one in four Australian children and young people (ACMS 2023). We know that domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children (AIHW 2024b).

Further, the impacts of domestic and family violence are all encompassing – impacting the NSW economy and state budget, and sectors such as justice, corrections, police, health, housing, homelessness, community services, education, women, mental health and child protection.

As such, Domestic Violence NSW calls on the NSW Government to continue to work with the specialist domestic and family violence sector in NSW to achieve our vision to end violence against women and children.

Investment from the NSW Government has been positive, including more support for perpetrators of violence to change their violent behaviour, safer housing for women and children, improved access to counselling, recovery services for children through the support of specialist workers, and safe refuge for companion animals.

However, there is more that needs to be done to end domestic and family violence. As the key priority for the NSW Budget 2025-26, Domestic Violence NSW is seeking a 50 per cent baseline funding increase for all specialist domestic and family violence services, so that frontline services have sufficient resourcing to meet demand (\$163 million).

This submission also recommends actions for the NSW Government across four key areas that will provide immediate help to end the violence, as well as the investments required for long-term change. They are:

- Meeting the demand on existing services
- Ensuring equitable access for all
- Expanding services for statewide coverage
- Building the sector that we need

This submission presents evidence-based funding priorities to the NSW Government, derived from member consultation, sector engagement and analysis of the latest research. It builds on our collaboration with the Attorney General, the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.

Aligned with the NSW Government's wellbeing themes of *Housed (stable living conditions)* and *Secure (safety at home)*, the recommended priorities aim to reduce the financial and social costs of domestic and family violence, benefiting women, children and the broader NSW community.

Additionally, these funding priorities support the NSW Government's commitment to:

- The [*National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*](#), the [*First Action Plan \(2023-2027\)*](#), the [*First Action Plan 2023-2027 Activities Addendum*](#), and the [*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025*](#)

- The National Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety (in development)
- Rollout the [Crimes Legislation Amendment \(Coercive Control\) Act 2022](#)
- Implement the [NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027](#).
- Implement the [NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027](#)
- Implement [Pathways to Prevention: NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence \(2024 – 2028\)](#)
- Implement the NSW Aboriginal Domestic and Family Violence Plan (in development)
- Implement the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Strategy (in development).
- Implement the [NSW Health Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Domestic and Family Violence 2021-2026](#)
- Implement the [NSW Women's Strategy 2023-2026](#)
- Respond to the [National Agreement to Closing the Gap](#), Target 13: By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50 per cent, as progress towards zero.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the priorities of the NSW Government's 2025-2026 Budget.

Note: Alongside this submission, Domestic Violence NSW supports the pre-budget submissions of [No To Violence](#), the [NSW Council of Social Service \(NCOSS\)](#), [People With Disability Australia](#) and [Lucy's Project](#).

Recommendations

Meeting the demand on existing services

1. Prioritise a 50 per cent baseline funding increase for all specialist domestic and family violence services, so that frontline services have sufficient resourcing to meet demand (\$163 million).
2. Increase brokerage for specialist domestic and family violence services by 50 per cent (\$8.3 million).

Ensuring equitable access for all

3. Pay a loading to all specialist domestic and family violence services operating in regional, rural and remote locations in NSW.
4. Increase the availability of transitional housing properties for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.
5. Provide a loading to women's refuges to fund support for migrant and refugee victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.
6. Commit \$3.45 million over two years to provide women on temporary visas access to essential support.
7. Commit \$12 million to provide victim-survivors of domestic and family violence from migrant and refugee backgrounds with culturally and religiously appropriate support.

Expanding services for statewide coverage

8. Provide recurrent funding for the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Scheme Hearing Support Pilot (\$6.55 million).
9. Provide recurrent funding for the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Scheme and NSW Police Force Co-location Pilot, and expansion beyond the 10 pilot sites (\$31 million).
10. Commit funding to expand Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services across NSW.
11. Commit funding to expand Specialist Workers for Children and Young People positions to all refuges in NSW (\$10 million).

Building the sector that we need

12. Commit a further \$62 million in funding to support the implementation of *Pathways to Prevention: NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024–2028*.
13. Commit \$10 million in funding to implement the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Development Strategy* being developed by the Department of Communities and Justice.
14. Commit a minimum of \$15 million in funding to implement the *Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety*, being led by the Department of Communities and Justice.
15. Commit funding to implement the *NSW Aboriginal Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Plan* being developed by the Department of Communities and Justice.
16. Provide \$440,000 per annum recurrent funding for the two Aboriginal-identified policy officer positions at Domestic Violence NSW.

Our detailed recommendations for priority investment

Meeting the demand on existing services

Recommendation 1: Prioritise a 50 per cent baseline funding increase (\$163 million in 2025-26) for all specialist domestic and family violence services, so that frontline services have sufficient resourcing to meet demand

A 50 per cent baseline funding boost will ensure frontline services are adequately resourced to meet growing demand and provide immediate and long-term specialist support for those experiencing or recovering from sexual, domestic and family violence. It would make sure specialist services are sufficiently funded to cover contracted service delivery and indexation and are able to effectively support their staff.

A baseline funding increase for specialist domestic and family violence services has remained absent in state budgets to date. However, domestic and family violence rates in NSW continue to increase, with many specialist services stretched to capacity; unable to meet demand. Over 2023-24, compared to the year prior, there has been a:

- 6.5 per cent rise in domestic and family violence-related assaults
- 7.6 per cent increase in intimidation, stalking and harassment
- 6.9 per cent more apprehended domestic violence orders (ADVOs)
- 9.0 per cent more breaches of ADVOs (BOCSAR 2024).

An increase in demand for support over the past year was also evident in a recent survey of 17 specialist domestic and family violence services conducted by Domestic Violence NSW. For instance, one regional service spanning three locations saw a 48 per cent increase in referrals, while an urban service experienced a 43 per cent increase in monthly client numbers.

This growth in need for support has widened a pre-existing gap between demand and supply for specialist domestic and family violence services. That gap is now material. One service reported unaccommodated clients increasing from 60 per 100 in 2022-23 to 96 per 100 in 2023-24, alongside a 59 per cent rise in children needing support. A regional service supported 319 case management and 84 case coordination referrals, despite only receiving funding for 40 and 22 clients, respectively.

Demand for support across adjacent sectors

Further data shows the rapidly growing demand for key domestic and family violence services across sectors such as justice and homelessness.

The demand for Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services rose 17 per cent between 2023-24 (Legal Aid NSW 2024), while, by June 2024, over 8,000 clients of Specialist Homelessness Services in NSW sought help for domestic and family violence. This represents about a 6 per cent increase from the previous year and is near the peak levels during COVID-19 (AIHW 2024).

Domestic and family violence victim-survivors now make up a third of all clients in NSW homelessness services. Further, domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children, with 42 per cent of Specialist Homelessness Services clients in NSW being victim-survivors leaving violence (AIHW 2021).

However, the data presented doesn't show the true need as there are likely high levels of 'hidden' demand for domestic and family violence services, as many people don't reach out for support due to various barriers. These include a lack of local services in regional and remote areas, a lack of culturally appropriate support, and services so overwhelmed they can't answer the phone or respond to requests.

Similarly, almost two thirds of respondents to the 2024 NCOSS Survey on Sector Sustainability have seen their costs exceed the funding received (NCOSS 2024). This chronic underfunding is jeopardising service sustainability and worker wellbeing, leaving many organisations at significant risk of failure, with funding that does not cover the cost of contracted service delivery, and inadequate indexation.

Comparison to other states

High levels of unmet demand for domestic and family violence services in NSW reflects significant underinvestment in specialist domestic and family services relative to other jurisdictions.

Both Victoria and Queensland spend substantially more than NSW on domestic and family violence services and programs on a per capita basis. Victoria spends almost three times as much as NSW (180 per cent more), and Queensland spends about 50 per cent more.

State	Program area	Funding 2024-25 (\$m)	Funding per capita (\$)
NSW	Prevent domestic and family violence, reduce reoffending and support victim safety ¹	\$326.6	\$38.07
Victoria	Family violence service delivery ²	\$748.1	\$106.52
Queensland	Women's safety and violence prevention ³	\$323.3	\$57.39

While reported funding levels are not fully comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in how funding is allocated across program delivery areas, NSW is still significantly underspending compared to other states.

A 50 per cent baseline funding increase for specialist domestic and family violence services would help bring NSW in line with Queensland, although it would remain far behind Victoria.

What is needed

Impact Economics and Policy (2024b) estimates that a baseline funding uplift in NSW would cost an additional \$163 million a year in 2025-26, for the following specific programs:

- Specialist women's homelessness services and refuges (excluding funding under the Core and Cluster program)
- Domestic Violence Response Enhancement
- Staying Home Leaving Violence
- Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services
- Men's Behaviour Change Programs
- Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services
- Specialist Workers for Children and Young People.

This funding increase has been calculated on the understanding that the NSW Government has committed about \$204 million in funding for these programs in 2024-25 (NSW Legal Aid 2024; DCJ 2024). The estimates include:

¹ Funding is an estimate based on expenditure reported in the NSW 2022-23 Budget Outcomes Statement. As an outcomes statement was not published in 2023-24, funding for 2023-24 and 2024-25 have been estimated by adding the new funding announced in the Budget for each year, assuming multi-year funding is spread evenly over years.

² Victorian Government Budget 2024-25, Department Performance Statement.

³ Queensland Government Budget 2024-25, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

- A 50 per cent baseline funding increase for most programs (except Men's Behaviour Change Programs and Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services)
- Additional funding already committed to in 2025-26 for the Staying Home Leaving Violence program, Integrated Domestic Family Violence Services and Aboriginal place-based responses⁴
- Allowance for inflation and population growth over time.⁵

A separate approach has been used for Men's Behaviour Change Programs and Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services.

It is important that the NSW Government invest in services to break the cycle of violence. Providers of Men's Behaviour Change Programs report long wait lists, with two large providers having over 700 people on their combined waitlists – resulting in a five month wait for support (Thomas-Sam & Rowland 2024).

No To Violence, the peak for services working with people using domestic and family violence, has estimated that an extra \$10.5 million in funding from the NSW Government is required in 2025-26 to adjust for wage inflation and ensure Men's Behaviour Change Programs are delivered to enhanced practice standards (see No To Violence's 2025-26 Pre-Budget Submission).

This funding ask of No To Violence is supported by Domestic Violence NSW.

The Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program estimates that an additional \$42 million a year is required to roll-out police co-location to 57 locations across NSW, as well as a further \$11 million to provide more Hearing Support Workers and one full-time identified Aboriginal Hearing Support worker at each site.

The additional funding amounts for each of these programs have also been adjusted to allow for inflation and population growth (applied to the total funding amount for each program).

Program	Current funding allocated for 2024-25\$m ⁶	Additional funding needed in 2025-26\$m
Domestic Violence Response Enhancement	11.6	6.5
Women's services/refuges	110.4	61.8
Staying Home Leaving Violence	20.3	21.6
Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services	6.4	5.6
Men's Behaviour Change Programs	11.5	16.3
Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services	32.7	45.0
Specialist Workers for Children and Young People	11.5	6.4
Total	204.4	163.1

Fiscal impact	2025-26\$m	2026-27\$m	2027-28\$m	2028-29\$m
Total baseline funding	367.5	381.8	396.4	411.2
Increase relative to 2024-25	163.1	177.4	192.0	206.8

⁴ A total of \$37.4 million for these three programs, according to data supplied by DCJ.

⁵ Assuming 2.5 per cent annual inflation, plus population growth based on projections using medium assumptions from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023), "Population Projections, Australia", Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/population-projections-australia/latest-release>

⁶ Based on data provided by DCJ. Where a funding amounts for 2024-25 were not provided, we have assumed that funding would remain at 2023-24 levels.

Recommendation 2: Increase brokerage for specialist domestic and family violence services by 50 per cent (\$8.3 million in 2025-26)

Increasing brokerage by 50 per cent for all specialist domestic and family violence services funded by the Department of Communities and Justice, will ensure flexible, client-centred responses to people experiencing domestic and family violence.

Brokerage funding addresses immediate needs like temporary accommodation, transport, or emergency financial assistance. However, many services lack sufficient funding to adequately meet these needs consistently – putting added strain on victim-survivors in crisis.

A recent survey by Domestic Violence NSW found that only one of 17 providers had enough funding to cover brokerage needs, while three services indicated that 100 per cent of brokerage needs were unfunded.

Several services raised concerns that contracted requirements for brokerage spending were inflexible, limiting the ability of services to tailor support based on individual client need. For example, the Staying Home Leaving Violence program allocates a fixed amount of brokerage funding per client, which doesn't account for the varying levels of support needed by different people.

More flexible brokerage arrangements would benefit services and victim-survivors, allowing funding to be directed where it's most needed, instead of applying a fixed amount to all clients. Many services currently do not receive government funding for brokerage and instead rely on pooling brokerage from fundraising, philanthropic donations, or make referrals to other services with more resources.

Impact Economics and Policy (2024b) estimates that currently, brokerage funding is about 4.5 per cent of total NSW Government funding, equating to about \$9 million (across the funding programs listed above in the baseline funding discussion) in 2024-25.

If brokerage funding was increased by 50 per cent, it would need to be 6.8 per cent of total funding (or equivalent to a 2.3 per cent increase in total funding). Combined with the 50 per cent increase in baseline funding, this would mean about \$8.3 million in additional funding for brokerage, or a total allocation of about \$25 million.

	2025-26 \$m	2026-27 \$m	2027-28 \$m	2028-29 \$m
Additional funding for brokerage	8.3	8.6	8.9	9.3

Ensuring equitable access for all

Recommendation 3: Pay a loading to all specialist domestic and family violence services operating in regional, rural and remote locations in NSW

To address the higher costs of service delivery outside of metropolitan regions, we recommend that the NSW Government pay a loading to all specialist domestic and family violence services funded by the Department of Communities and Justice that are operating in regional, rural and remote locations in NSW.

Given the increased service delivery costs and greater incidence of domestic and family violence in regional and remote areas of NSW, Impact Economics and Policy (2024b) estimates that services in inner and outer regional areas require about two to four times the funding of services in major cities (per person in the general population). Services in remote and very remote areas require nearly nine times the funding to operate sustainably and to meet demand.

Regional service delivery costs – multiple of costs in major cities, per head of general population			
Remoteness level	Cost of delivering a given level of services	Greater demand for services	Combined impact – regional loadings
Inner regional	1.16x	1.90x	2.21x
Outer regional	1.16x	3.16x	3.66x
Remote	1.20x	7.45x	8.94x
Very remote	1.20x	7.45x	8.94x

All domestic and family violence services operating in regional and remote areas should receive a loading in their funding arrangements which reflects the combined impact shown in the table above. This loading should be applied based on the total population in the service's catchment area.

Domestic and family violence services are significantly more costly to deliver in regional and remote parts of NSW. The cost challenges faced by services operating outside of major cities include:

- Significantly higher rates of domestic and family violence – compared to major cities, per-capita rates of domestic violence related assaults recorded by Police are six times higher in remote areas ⁷
- Greater difficulty attracting and retaining staff on the wages services can afford to offer,
- Higher travel costs, including direct expenses (e.g. fuel) and staff time, with staff taken away from frontline service delivery, and
- Higher brokerage costs to support clients to access specialist services, especially when they need to travel for several hours to the nearest regional centre.

While it is unclear how the significant cost differences between metro and regional services are currently factored into funding arrangements, Domestic Violence NSW recommends that all domestic and family violence services operating in regional and remote parts of NSW are provided with additional funding beyond base funding, to account for the higher costs they face.

⁷ Impact Economics and Policy analysis of [BOSCAR domestic violence statistics](#) by Local Government Area, using remoteness classifications from the NSW Local Government Grants Commission.

Recommendation 4: Increase availability of transitional housing properties for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence

Auditing potential properties across NSW for meanwhile use and fast-tracking development proposals will support the NSW government to increase the availability of transitional housing properties for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, including women on temporary visas.

Transitional properties tend to be managed by Community Housing Providers, rather than Homes NSW, offering the only type of accommodation outside the private rental market that women on temporary visas may be eligible for. Expanding transitional properties is another mechanism to create more exit pathways out of refuges.

With only 1,500 transitional properties in the Homes NSW portfolio across the state, bottlenecks have emerged in women's refuges. While most of these properties are reserved for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, they rarely become available as a lack of exit pathways means the length of stay in these properties tends to be two to three years.

Compounding the issue, women on temporary visas rely heavily on transitional properties as an exit out of refuges, as they are ineligible for housing support through the broader Homes NSW system. A recent survey by Domestic Violence NSW revealed close to 60 per cent of women on temporary visas were exited from refuge into transitional properties. This survey data will be published in a report in 2025.

While the NSW government have indicated their plan to redevelop appropriate properties for meanwhile use and transitional housing for victim-survivors experiencing domestic and family violence, there needs to be a focus on availability of properties in regional and rural areas, particularly where the new Core and Cluster refuges are being built, to ensure exit pathways are being created where they are most needed.

Recommendation 5: Provide a loading to women's refuges to fund support for migrant and refugee victim-survivors of domestic and family violence

Introducing a loading for women's refuges funded by the Department of Communities and Justice will enable specialist domestic and family violence services to better meet the needs of migrants and refugees experiencing domestic and family violence.

An estimated one in three migrant and refugee women in Australia have experienced domestic and family violence – a higher rate than the general population (Segrave, Wickes & Keel 2021). These women and children face unique challenges that make it more difficult to escape violence or reach out for help, including cultural barriers, lack of culturally safe services, and limited social support. Those who are in Australia on temporary visas (e.g. people seeking asylum, students and temporary workers) may have very limited social support networks in Australia and are often excluded from mainstream and other health services.

There is significant unmet demand for support among migrant and refugee women and children escaping family violence. Domestic and family violence agencies are well placed to provide appropriate support, but insufficient funding limits their ability to hire appropriately trained specialist staff and deliver essential services. Increased funding for migrant and refugee services would enable greater outreach and culturally sensitive services, including casework, interpreters and community education.

Specialist domestic and family violence support for migrant and refugee populations is also more complex and costly to deliver than general domestic and family violence assistance due to factors such as:

- Greater complexity of casework, requiring more time per client.
- Higher accommodation costs (for Specialist Homelessness Services), as affordable accommodation is harder to find and so clients stay longer.

- Almost all clients have children who also require support.
- Clients generally need greater assistance to access health, legal and consular services, as well as to pay for necessities (such as food or schooling), which requires greater caseworker time and brokerage.

Services estimate that providing specialist domestic and family violence support to migrant and refugee populations can cost around 1.5 to 2 times as much as non-migrant and refugee clients. Additionally, people seeking asylum or temporary visa holders, who make up an estimated one third to two thirds of all migrant and refugee clients, can cost up to twice as much to support as permanent residents (Impact Economics and Policy 2024b).

Impact Economics and Policy (2024b) estimates that specialist domestic and family violence services for migrant and refugee populations costs roughly 2.2 times more than mainstream domestic and family violence services.

In NSW, roughly 23 per cent of the population – more than one in five people – were born overseas in a majority non-English speaking country (ABS 2021). While data on temporary visa holders is limited, estimates indicate that there are nearly 500,000 temporary visa holders (excluding New Zealand citizens) living in NSW (with 85 per cent of these in Sydney), representing a further six per cent of the population (ABS 2023b).

In total, this means about 12 per cent of the population is either a recent migrant from a non-English speaking background and/or temporary visa holder (Impact Economics and Policy 2024b).

Specialist migrant/refugee services – multiple of costs of mainstream services, per head of general population		
Sub-group	Population share	Cost loadings
NESB migrants (permanent resident or citizen) who arrived in Australia in the last 10 years	6 per cent	1.5x
Temporary visa holders (excluding New Zealand citizens)	6 per cent	3.0x
Combined	12 per cent	2.2x

The loadings for migrant and refugee services have been estimated with the assumption that migrant and refugee services receive a part of total baseline funding based on their share of the population in each region. In addition, a cost uplift has been added which reflects the costs of service delivery for temporary visa holders at 3.0 times the general cost, and service delivery for other migrant/refugee populations at 1.5 times the general cost.

Ideally, loadings for migrant/refugee services would also account for higher rates of domestic and family violence among the relevant populations. However, since comparable data on domestic and family violence between migrant and refugee populations versus the general population are not available, this has not been factored into the estimates. Accordingly, the estimated loadings are conservative.

Recommendation 6: Commit \$3.45 million over two years to provide women on temporary visas access to essential support

Urgent funding investment of \$3.45 million over two years is needed to alleviate the financial burden on specialist domestic and family violence refuges that support victim-survivors on temporary visas.

A modest funding injection will allow refuges to assist moving victim-survivors on temporary visas through the refuge system faster by ensuring their migration status and related legal proceedings are prioritised, in turn, providing vacancies for other victim-survivors in need.

A recent report by Domestic Violence NSW indicated that 38 women's refuges spent almost \$320,000 over a three-month period supporting women on temporary visas and their children. The costs incurred included living allowances, case management and related costs, medical expenses, food, clothing, transport and vouchers. The average cost of support per family was \$4,800, although the actual cost is likely to be much higher.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria highlighted the complex support needs of women and children without permanent residency, particularly within the existing refuge system. The Royal Commission heard that women on temporary visas face significant barriers in both accessing and exiting refuge and crisis accommodation, and subsequently recommended the Victorian Government "review the contractual arrangements for crisis supported accommodation to remove barriers for particular groups, such as women with no income" (State of Victoria, 2016). As a result, the Victorian Government has introduced a \$1.8 million support package over four years for victim-survivors on temporary visas in refuge accommodation. Support is allocated based on refuge capacity and average length of stay.

Safe and Equal, the Victorian peak body for domestic and family violence, notes that for the last financial year, Victorian refuges supported 170 women on temporary visas and their families, spending approximately \$4,000 per family. This money covered legal support including immigration, document translation for Centrelink, family law and family violence-related criminal matters, medical costs, facilitating reengagement of employment, English classes and in some cases repatriation flights.

This financial support is crucial to victim-survivors on temporary visas obtaining permanent residency faster and therefore allowing them to move into more secure housing. This then frees up spaces for other victim-survivors to move into the refuge – reducing the burden on an overwhelmed system.

Recommendation 7: Commit \$12 million to provide victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds with access to culturally and religiously appropriate support

To ensure culturally safe and appropriate support for migrants and refugees experiencing domestic violence, we are calling on the NSW government to commit \$12 million to fund a pilot program (over two years) that supports 20 specialist migrant and refugee workers in women's refuges (\$6 million), and 20 specialist domestic and family violence workers in migrant and refugee support services (\$6 million).

The pilot costings are inclusive of salaries and ongoing operational costs, including travel and interpreter fees. The cost per worker over two years, including overheads, is \$300,000.

Victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds experience unique challenges, including gender and racial discrimination, when attempting to navigate systems and services. Yet victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds often don't have access to community-controlled specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence services that meet their needs. Culturally appropriate service responses are essential to ensure safety, and accessible and effective support.

Victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds may feel more comfortable accessing support services that are equipped to understand and respond to their cultural, language and religious needs. Local migrant and refugee services serve as soft entry points for victim-survivors in the local community to disclose experiences of domestic and family violence. It is therefore critical they receive an appropriate domestic and family violence-informed response within the context of their cultural, social and religious background.

Conversely, funding refuges to ensure that victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds receive a culturally and religiously appropriate response will assist in addressing the barriers mainstream organisations face in assisting diverse community groups.

Strengthening the domestic and family violence sector's ability to respond to the specific needs of migrant and refugee victim-survivors is essential. This requires investment in both the diversity of the workforce and the uplifting of capabilities for culturally responsive practice.

Bilingual and bicultural domestic and family violence practitioners, as well as those with expertise in addressing the unique challenges that migrant and refugee victim-survivors face, are crucial for building trust and improving engagement with services. Funding workers in both mainstream women's refuges and migrant and refugee support services will ensure that migrant and refugee victim-survivors receive specialist domestic and family violence support, tailored to their cultural, social, language, and faith needs at both crisis and early intervention stages.

Expanding services for state-wide coverage

Recommendation 8: Provide recurrent funding for the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service Hearing Support Pilot (\$6.55 million)

Recurrent funding should be committed for the Hearing Support Pilot across all 27 Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service sites beyond 2028, at a cost of \$6.55 million per annum.

The Hearing Support Pilot has achieved exceptional results since its commencement, as confirmed by its evaluation which concludes that "the Pilot should continue to operate and should cease to be a Pilot and be funded on a continuing and permanent basis" (Wangmann, Kaye & Thomas 2024, p. 4).

The evaluation shows the Pilot has met the objectives of reducing stress and trauma for victim-survivors involved in the court process, improving their engagement with the court and reducing the likelihood of disengagement. The support provided by the Hearing Support workers also helped victim-survivors present better quality evidence in a defended hearing and ensured they obtained Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders with appropriate conditions (Wangmann, Kaye & Thomas 2024).

Given its success, Domestic Violence NSW urges the NSW Government to rename the pilot to the 'Hearing Support Program' and provide recurrent funding across all 27 Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service sites beyond 2028.

Recommendation 9: Provide recurrent funding for the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service and NSW Police Force Co-location Pilot, and expansion beyond the 10 pilot sites (\$31 million)

The NSW Government should ensure recurrent funding to and expansion of the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Scheme and NSW Police Force Co-location Pilot beyond the 10 pilot sites, at a cost of \$31 million per year.

Since commencement, the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service and NSW Police Co-Location Pilot has received overwhelmingly positive results. In particular, the Fairfield co-location site has showcased effective local collaboration and presentation across multiple forums. The pilot has received strong support from NSW Police at all levels as it assists officers to carry out their duties.

The final program evaluation from the University of Wollongong is expected to be delivered in early 2025. Police Commissioner Karen Webb indicated in an August 2024 Budget Estimate hearing that an interim report from the evaluator shows "promising signs".

A case study provided to Domestic Violence NSW further highlights the pilot's impact. A woman initially arrested for assault was later identified as the victim-survivor of domestic violence with the help of a Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service worker.

With the support of the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service worker, the victim-survivor made statements to both General Duties and Detectives, resulting in over fifteen domestic violence charges being laid against the perpetrator. The victim-survivor continues to receive support from Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service.

It is important to note, Police responded appropriately at the scene, based on the information they had before them. It was only after speaking with a skilled social worker in a quiet, private room, that the woman felt safe enough to disclose the extent of the domestic and family violence she had endured.

NSW Police are eager to expand the program state-wide, with Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service workers available on weekends and outside of business hours. This is to accommodate the high volume of domestic violence reports outside of business hours. An extension of the pilot's hours would significantly increase the number of victim-survivors who would benefit from the service.

Domestic Violence NSW recommends that the NSW government provide recurrent funding to expand the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service and NSW Police Force Co-location Pilot to 57 locations across NSW, to enable them to operate seven days per week, from 8am-8pm, with one worker per Police Area Command/Police District.

Expansion of the pilot will cost approximately \$31 million per year. Domestic Violence NSW recommends a staged roll out of five sites at a time, three times per year.

Recommendation 10: Commit funding to expand Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services across NSW

The NSW Government should commit to expanding the number of Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services across NSW to ensure statewide service delivery, and that this funding is committed for five years.

The Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services Program provides a multi-agency, integrated and coordinated response to domestic and family violence among high-risk target groups and in targeted communities. The program intervenes following the identification of domestic and family violence in a family. Identification usually occurs via police, health services, child protection agencies and/or support services such as family support programs.

Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services provide adult, young people and child victim-survivors with support to leave and recover from the abuse. The program provides ongoing practical and emotional support to both victim-survivors who remain in a relationship with the perpetrator, and victim-survivors who have ended the relationship. Children and young people are considered as victim-survivors and direct services are provided. Direct services to children are negotiated and agreed by the parent client of the service. Some Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services sites also provide interventions to perpetrators.

Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services are key in the response to domestic and family violence in NSW, as they work with the whole family, including women who wish to remain in with a perpetrator or are not safe to leave. This makes these services unlike other programs, such as Staying Home Leaving Violence which requires that the relationship should be over before victim-survivors can engage in the program, or Specialist Homelessness Services that most often work with women after they have fled or are planning to leave.

Domestic Violence NSW consistently receives feedback from members working with priority populations, such as the Aboriginal and migrant and refugee communities, that there is an urgent need for whole-of-family support. An expansion of the Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services Program would respond to this service gap.

Recommendation 11: Commit funding to expand Specialist Workers for Children and Young People positions to all refuges in NSW (\$10 million)

To ensure statewide service coverage, we recommend that the NSW Government expand the Specialist Child and Young People Worker program beyond the current 32 funded women's refuges to all existing refuges in NSW, as well as all new Core and Cluster funded refuges.

An additional \$10 million in 2025-26 will fund a further 20 workers, with a commitment to an annual \$10 million expansion 20 additional workers in 2026-27 and 2027-28.

Children and young people are victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, alongside their parents and carers, and require specialist and tailored support. An estimated 2.6 million people aged 18 years and over (13 per cent) witnessed violence towards a parent by a partner before the age of 15 (ABS Personal Safety Survey 2023). Investing in the recovery of children and young people prevents future violence and victimisation.

Expansion this program statewide will ensure all children and young people presenting to crisis accommodation and Core and Cluster services in NSW have access to age-appropriate support as a primary victim-survivor of domestic and family violence.

This highly successful program was [formally evaluated](#) by the Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, on behalf of the Department of Communities and Justice. The program has already positively impacted young victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, helping them return to school and childcare, access health services such as dental, optical, auditory and childhood vaccinations, specialist mental health services, and secure appropriate accommodation.

In line with the recommendations of the evaluation, the Department of Communities and Justice should:

- Commit sustainable funding for program expansion, placing workers other refuges that provide support to children and young people.
- Incorporate specialist workers for children and young people into core funding for all Specialist Homelessness Service-funded refuges that support children and young people.
- Continue to allow flexibility in funding to ensure services are responsive to children and young people's needs, local context, and organisations' existing staffing structure.
- Allow funds to be used for brokerage for school-associated costs (e.g. school uniforms, excursions), and health and mental health specialist services, and for services based in regional locations.
- Commit funding for supervision and professional development for specialist workers.
- Align funding with the Specialist Homelessness Service funding cycle to ensure sufficient time to achieve outcomes, provide greater certainty to services and their staff, and improve continuity of client care through practice development and staff retention.

Building the sector that we need

Recommendation 12: Commit a further \$62 million in funding to support the implementation of *Pathways to Prevention: NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (2024 – 2028)*

Domestic Violence NSW recommends that the NSW Government increase its investment to implement the *NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024-2028* to \$100 million over four years.

In 2024, the NSW Government announced \$38 million to implement the *NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024-2028*. This investment falls \$62 million short of the \$100 million over four years as advocated by Domestic Violence NSW on behalf of the specialist domestic and family violence sector.

Sexual, domestic, and family violence is a symptom of wider gendered inequality. Efforts to eliminate this violence should start with investment in the primary prevention of violence - changing community attitudes and behaviours to help stop family violence before it starts.

Violence prevention initiatives require leadership and coordination of implementation, as well as the resourcing of local initiatives and marginalised groups to adapt violence prevention initiatives to their own context.

Immediate investment in violence prevention programs, such as community education and early intervention can help to stop the violence. Everyone has a role to play, from grassroots community-based organisations to women's health services, early childhood, schools and other education providers, sporting associations, the arts, workplaces, all levels of government, local communities, and individuals.

In 2009, a report prepared by KPMG for the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (funded by the Commonwealth Government), stated that for every woman whose experience of violence could be prevented, \$20,766 in costs could be avoided. Reducing violence against women and their children by just 10 per cent in 2021-22 would have saved \$1.6 billion in costs to victim-survivors, their friends and families, perpetrators, children, employers, governments, and the community.

The Victorian Government has committed to extensive investment in primary prevention and serves as a model for prevention spending in NSW.

Recommendation 13: Commit \$10 million in funding to implement the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Development Strategy*, being developed by the Department of Communities and Justice

The NSW Government must commit \$10 million towards implementation over the first three years of the proposed *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Development Strategy* being led by the Department of Communities and Justice.

In 2022, the NSW Government commissioned the development of a ten-year *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Development Strategy*. The Strategy aims to strengthen the NSW domestic and family violence service system by building a sector that can attract, retain and support a specialist, diverse workforce that has the capacity and expertise to meet growing service demand and complexity.

Successful implementation of the Strategy would ensure specialist domestic and family violence and allied services are able to provide a holistic, coordinated and evidence-based response to domestic and family violence in NSW.

Domestic Violence NSW requests that the NSW Government effectively respond to the workforce challenges being faced by the specialist domestic and family violence sector in NSW, including enhancing workforce sustainability, and providing career opportunities and workplace supports for workers in this sector that carries high risks of vicarious trauma and burnout.

As outlined in the *2023 Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Baseline Survey* conducted by Domestic Violence NSW on behalf of the Department of Communities and Justice, the key challenges that need to be addressed in implementation of the Strategy are:

- Workplace conditions: the ability to access housing for clients, an increased volume of clients, and burnout.
- Supervision: comprehensive access to professional supervision for all workers.
- Training: access to specialist training, overcoming lack of time as a barrier to accessing training and development opportunities.
- Health and wellbeing: addressing work-related stress.
- Career and future intentions: addressing burnout, a lack of career progression opportunities, and stress/pressure of the workplace.
- Recruitment: addressing the challenges of recruitment related to a lack of appropriately experienced or qualified applicants.

Recommendation 14: Commit a minimum of \$15 million in funding to implement the Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety, being led by the Department of Communities and Justice

Domestic Violence NSW recommend that the NSW Government commit a minimum of \$15 million towards implementation of the Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety, being led by the Department of Communities and Justice.

The proposed Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety lays out a consistent, coordinated, and effective response to domestic and family violence throughout NSW and ensures that responders have clearly defined roles. Failure to fund the implementation of the Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety would leave specialist, statutory and universal responders unclear about their responsibility in the response to domestic and family violence, which places victim-survivors at great risk of harm.

The Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety represents an overarching vision and shared approach for the domestic and family violence sector.

NSW Government investment for implementation of the Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety needs to account for widespread structural changes, legislative changes, policy alignment and training across the broad range of universal, statutory and specialist sectors.

The Department of Communities and Justice is using Victoria's Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework as a baseline source of evidence and key model in relation to reform implementation costing and approach to risk assessment and safety in NSW, alongside the ANROWS and Healing Foundation model being used in Queensland.

Recommendation 15: Commit funding to implement the *NSW Aboriginal Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Plan* being developed by the Department of Communities and Justice

Domestic Violence NSW recommend that the NSW Government fund the implementation of the *NSW Aboriginal Domestic and Family Violence Plan*, with an emphasis on building the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, and on

mainstream domestic and family violence services being culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

Domestic Violence NSW calls for:

- A substantial commitment of NSW Government funding towards implementation of the Plan
- An emphasis on funding Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Additional funding for specialist Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations delivering domestic and family violence services
- Funding to ensure the sustainability of the Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network (AWAN)
- Support for Aboriginal workers, for example, the availability of cultural supports, a community of practice for Aboriginal workers, and/or networking events
- Funding for more Senior Aboriginal Workers in mainstream domestic and family violence services
- Accountability for mainstream child protection organisations working with Aboriginal families
- Recognition that Aboriginal women often do not access Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs), and alternative supports (such as the Leaving Violence Program) need to be considered and prioritised.

Recommendation 16: Provide recurrent funding of \$440,000 per annum for the two Aboriginal identified policy officer positions at Domestic Violence NSW

Domestic Violence NSW recommend that the NSW Government provide recurrent funding of \$440,000 per annum for the two Aboriginal identified positions at Domestic Violence NSW – a Senior Aboriginal Policy officer and an Aboriginal Policy Officer currently funded via the National Partnership Agreement until end June 2025. This funding includes management fees, all costs for the Domestic Violence NSW Aboriginal Steering Committee, \$30,000 for consultancy fees, and travel costs for visiting remote areas.

Best practice principles for recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers point to the importance of providing culturally safe workplaces. This ongoing investment will mitigate the risks inherent in short-term contracts when recruiting staff and building cultural safety within Domestic Violence NSW, having recently invested in onboarding two Aboriginal staff.

The two Aboriginal Policy Officer positions enable Domestic Violence NSW to effectively support consultation undertaken by the NSW Government and other stakeholders with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors.

These key roles provide advice and information to various departments within the NSW Government on domestic and family violence-related funding, legislation policy and programs. They are a key point of contact for government in relation to the work of NSW specialist workers to address disproportionate rates of violence experienced in Aboriginal communities.

These positions strengthen support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and foster development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specialist domestic and family violence workforce in a manner that is culturally safe, respectful, and aligned with community needs.

These roles will assist in delivering on *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 per cent by 2031, headed towards 0*, the targets set out in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025*, and the development of the *NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Plan*.

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Appendix one – Terminology

Domestic violence

Interpersonal violence or abuse perpetrated by an intimate partner or ex-partner. Domestic violence can include a variety of forms of abuse including but not limited to, physical, sexual, psychological, financial abuse, physical stalking, and intimidation. Domestic violence is gendered and is most commonly underpinned by coercive control, which is a pattern of behaviour utilising many different tactics to create a web of entrapment, often involving the exploitation of power imbalances.

Family violence

Violence perpetrated by a family member, carer, guardian, child, or kinship carer. Family violence can include a variety of forms of abuse including but not limited to, physical, sexual, psychological, financial abuse, physical stalking, and intimidation. Family violence is gendered and is most commonly underpinned by coercive control, which is a pattern of behaviour utilising many different tactics to create a web of entrapment, often involving the exploitation of power imbalances.

Gendered violence

Gendered violence or gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals because of their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms. The term is primarily used to draw attention to the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence. While women and girls suffer disproportionately from gendered violence, men and particularly boys can also be victims. The term is inclusive of LGBTIQ+ populations, referencing violence related to norms of masculinity/femininity and/or gender norms.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Abuse perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner such as a partner, husband, wife, girlfriend, boyfriend, or person who someone is dating. Term is often used interchangeably with domestic violence.

People with lived expertise

People with lived expertise are people who have experience of sexual, domestic and/or family violence whose expertise as context experts due to their lived experience is noted.

Specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector

The specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector includes crisis and refuge services, transitional accommodation and community housing providers, family support services, Aboriginal controlled organisations, specialist multicultural community organisations, specialist LGBTIQ+ organisations, counselling services, sexual violence services, specialist homelessness service providers, men's behaviour change programs and networks, community organisations working with high-risk communities, specialist women's legal and support services, women's health centres, women and children's support services, Safe at Home programs and the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services.

Victim-survivor

Victim-survivor refers to a person who is being or has experienced violence, acknowledging that people who have been victimised are survivors and are also victims of crime. We acknowledge that people who have been victimised are survivors and are also victims of crime. This is not intended as an identity term. In the specialist domestic and family violence sector, the preferred term is victim-survivor.

Domestic Violence NSW notes that the justice sector and legislation use the term victim. In this submission, although used interchangeably, the emphasis has been placed on the term victim-survivor, with victim used at times particularly when discussing the justice system or legislation.

Coercive control

Coined by Evan Stark, Buzawa and Stark (2017, p. 105) define coercive control as “a strategic course of gender-based abuse in which some combination of physical and sexual violence, intimidation, degradation, isolation, control and arbitrary violations of liberty are used to subjugate a partner and deprive her of basic rights and resources”. This web of abuse has the end goal of entrapment and is a conscious, concerted effort by the abuser. Also known as intimate terrorism, this coercive control is the foundational underpinning of domestic and family violence, not simply another form of violence. Another way to think about this comes from Emma Katz, who describes coercive control as a toolbox, and the forms of abuse (financial, technological, humiliation and degradation etc.) as the individual tools. This is different to rarer instances of situational couple violence, which can be just as lethal, but are not motivated by the desire to entrap their victim.

Appendix two – Costing note

See attached report: Impact Economics and Policy 2024, *Domestic Violence NSW Costing Note*

Impact Economics and Policy – DVNSW Costing Note

Overview

This costing note outlines the potential budgetary requirements of four ‘policy asks’ identified by Domestic Violence New South Wales (DVNSW), which are aimed at enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services in New South Wales. Prepared by Impact Economics and Policy, this analysis provides estimates for the additional funding required to address critical service gaps and unmet needs.

	2025-26 \$m	2026-27 \$m	2027-28 \$m	2028-29 \$m
Baseline funding				
<i>Total baseline funding</i>	367.5	381.8	396.4	411.2
<i>Increase, relative to 2024-25 levels</i>	163.1	177.4	192.0	206.8
Additional funding required for:				
<i>Brokerage funding</i>	8.3	8.6	8.9	9.3
<i>Regional services</i>	nq	nq	nq	nq
<i>Migrant/refugee services</i>	nq	nq	nq	nq
Totals				
<i>Total funding</i>	375.8	390.4	405.3	420.5
<i>Increase, relative to 2024-25</i>	171.4	186.0	200.9	216.1

nq = Not quantifiable with available data.

Policy 1: Baseline funding increase

DVNSW's policy ask of a 50 per cent increase in baseline funding for specialist DFV services across New South Wales is reasonable given clear evidence of increasing demand for services, as well as likely high levels of unmet need across the state. A material uplift to baseline funding would allow services to expand capacity, deliver higher-quality supports and assist a greater number of clients, ensuring individuals in need of assistance are not turned away.

Impact Economics and Policy estimates that a baseline funding uplift would cost an additional **\$163 million** a year in 2025-26. This has been costed for the following specific programs:

- Specialist women's homelessness services and refuges (**excluding** funding under the Core and Cluster program)
- Domestic Violence Response Enhancement
- Staying Home Leaving Violence
- Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services
- Men's Behaviour Change Programs
- Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services
- Specialist Workers for Children and Young People

Methodology

Unfortunately, the past year has seen significant increases in domestic and family violence across New South Wales, with many services stretched to capacity and unable to meet demand.

Increasing rates of violence across NSW

Large increases in DFV-related offenses were recorded by Police over 2023-24, compared to the year prior. This includes:

- **6.5 per cent** increase in DFV-related assaults;
- **7.6 per cent** increase in intimidation, stalking and harassment;
- **6.9 per cent** more apprehended domestic violence orders (ADVOs) commenced; and
- **9.0 per cent** more breaches of ADVOs.¹

There has also been a **9 per cent** increase in DFV-related applications to the NSW Government's victim support scheme. Over half of all applications to the scheme related to DFV.²

¹ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2024), "Domestic violence", Available: <https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/topic-areas/domestic-violence.html>

² NSW Department of Communities and Justice annual reports, 2022-23 and 2023-24.

DVNSW provider survey

DVNSW recently surveyed 17 DFV service provider organisations to better understand the demand and cost pressures faced by the sector. Services report experiencing significant growth in demand over the past year. For example:

- A regional service spanning three locations has seen a 48 per cent increase in referrals.
- A regional service operating across four locations reports a 34 per cent rise in requests for enrolment in community programs aimed at addressing post-separation needs.
- An urban service accommodating 104 clients and conducting 72 outreach services has experienced a 43 per cent increase in monthly client numbers, rising from 23 to 33 in the last year.
- A mostly urban service operating across eight locations reports a 20 per cent increase in clients served and a 42 per cent rise in sheltered clients over 2023-24.

This growth has widened a pre-existing gap between demand and supply for specialist DFV services. That gap is now material:

- One service reported unaccommodated clients increasing from 60 per 100 in 2022-23 to 96 per 100 in 2023-24, alongside a 59 per cent rise in children needing support during the same period.
- A regional service supporting 5,000 people each year handles 319 case management and 84 case coordination referrals, despite only receiving funding for 40 and 22 clients respectively.
- Another regional service turns away five families every day due to limited capacity.
- A regional service supporting 400 people annually reports that for every client served, another is turned away due to inadequate resourcing.
- A service operating across multiple locations supporting 110 people annually estimates a 40 per cent increase in service delivery if additional resources were made available.

Other data also reveals rapidly growing demand for key DFV services. In 2023-24, demand for Women's Domestic Violence **Court Advocacy Services** increased by 17 per cent.³ Legal Aid NSW has reported that calls to its domestic violence hotline have increased by 36 per cent, and duty lawyer services increased by 61 per cent, over the

³ Legal Aid NSW (2024), *Annual Report 2023-24*, p. 79.

last two years.⁴ Nationally, an estimated 52,000 women facing domestic violence are turned away from legal services each year because of a lack of funding.⁵

At the same time, providers of **men's behaviour change programs** are reporting long wait lists, with two large providers having over 700 people on their combined waitlists, with applicants waiting up to 5 months for a place.⁶

In June 2024, there were over 8,000 clients of **special homelessness services** in New South Wales who were seeking assistance for DFV. This is about 6 per cent higher than a year earlier, and close to the peak reached during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ People seeking assistance for DFV make up a third of all clients of NSW homelessness services.

However, many homelessness services are stretched to capacity and unable to meet demand. A recent survey of 33 specialist homelessness services by Impact Economics and Policy found that 4 in 10 providers were forced to close their doors to people seeking help at least once during the survey fortnight. This includes services that support people escaping DFV.⁸ At the same time, the number of people at risk of homelessness has been rising—up an estimated 64 per cent in New South Wales over the six years to 2022, equivalent to about a **9 per cent** increase each year.⁹

⁴ Legal Aid NSW (2024), "We don't turn anyone away': Demand for domestic violence legal aid grows amid epidemic", Media release, 23 April, Available: <https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/about-us/news/media-releases/demand-for-dv-legal-aid-grows-amid-epidemic>

⁵ Cleal, O. (2024), "52,000 women facing domestic violence turned away from legal services due to funding shortages", Women's Agenda, 1 February, Available: <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/52000-women-facing-domestic-violence-turned-away-from-legal-services-due-to-funding-shortages/>

⁶ Thomas-Sam, A. and Rowland, M. (2024), "Waitlist times for men seeking help for violent behaviour reach five months as organisations call for more support", ABC News, 24 May, Available: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-24/mens-behavioural-change-program-wait-lists-reach-five-months/103890302>; SBS News (2024), "Violent men seeking help waiting months for services, compromising safety of women", 2 May, Available: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/violent-men-seeking-help-waiting-months-for-services-compromising-safety-of-women/3g2d1ukxp>

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024), "Specialist homelessness services: Monthly data", Available: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-monthly-data/data>

⁸ Impact Economics and Policy (2024), *Call Unanswered: Unmet Demand for Specialist Homelessness Services*, Available: <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Impact-Economics-Call-Unanswered.pdf>

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High levels of unmet demand mean an increasing number of women and children are at risk of harm.

There are likely to be high levels of ‘hidden’ demand for DFV services. Individuals in need of help may never reach out to services for a number of reasons, including that:

- services are overstretched, lack the capability to help, or are so overwhelmed they are unable to answer the phone or reply to requests sent via email or social media;
- services are unavailable locally, especially in regional and remote parts of the state;
- people do not feel comfortable to reach out for help because they are unaware that help is available, or there is a lack of culturally appropriate supports (for example, for First Nations or migrant women).

In combination with record low levels of rental affordability, the inability to obtain help from specialist DFV and homelessness services means that many women face the choice of staying with a violent partner, or ending up homeless.¹⁰ This elevates the risk of harm, especially where women have young children in their care and may find leaving a partner much more difficult in the absence of appropriate accommodation and supports.

Comparison to other states

High levels of unmet demand for DFV services in New South Wales reflect significant underinvestment in these services relative to other jurisdictions. Both Victoria and Queensland spend significantly more than New South Wales on DFV services and programs on a per capita basis. Victoria spends almost three times as much as New South Wales (**180 per cent** more), and Queensland spends about **50 per cent** more.

State	Program area	Funding 2024-25 (\$m)	Funding per capita (\$)
NSW	Prevent DFV, reduce reoffending and support victim safety ¹¹	\$326.6	\$38.07
Victoria	Family violence service delivery ¹²	\$748.1	\$106.52
Queensland	Women’s safety and violence prevention ¹³	\$323.3	\$57.39

¹⁰ Summers, A. (2022), *The Choice: Violence of poverty*.

¹¹ Funding is an estimate based on expenditure reported in the NSW 2022-23 Budget Outcomes Statement. As an outcomes statement was not published in 2023-24, funding for [2023-24](#) and [2024-25](#) have been estimated by adding the new funding announced in the Budget for each year, assuming multi-year funding is spread evenly over years.

¹² Victorian Government Budget 2024-25, Department Performance Statement.

¹³ Queensland Government Budget 2024-25, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

While reported funding levels are not fully comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in how funding is allocated across program delivery areas, it is clear that New South Wales is currently significantly underspending compared to other States.

A similar pattern is seen in funding for specialist homelessness services, for which nationally comparable expenditure data is published by the Productivity Commission. This data shows that in New South Wales is the lowest-spending jurisdiction across Australia on a per-capita basis, spending just \$39 per person in 2022-23 (the latest year of available data), compared to a national average of \$53, and \$76 in Victoria.¹⁴

Estimating funding requirements

The information above provides very strong evidence that demand for DFV services in New South Wales is increasing substantially, beyond the funding boost announced in last year's State budget. In addition, there are also high levels of pre-existing unmet demand which services are unable to meet.

Accordingly, DVNSW's policy ask for a 50 per cent increase in baseline funding is reasonable. A 50 per cent increase in baseline funding for services would help bring New South Wales in line with Queensland, although it would still remain far behind Victoria.

Impact Economics and Policy has estimated that **\$163 million** in additional funding is needed in 2025-26 for the programs listed in the table below, which fund specialist DFV services across the State. This has been calculated on the understanding that the NSW Government has committed about \$204 million in funding for these programs in 2024-25.¹⁵

The estimates include:

- a 50 per cent baseline funding increase for most programs (except for the two listed below);
- allowance for additional funding already committed to in 2025-26 for the Staying Home Leaving Violence program, Integrated Domestic Family Violence Services, and Aboriginal place-based responses;¹⁶ and
- allowance for inflation and population growth over time.¹⁷

¹⁴ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2024), *Report on Government Services*, Homelessness services data tables, table 19A.1, Available: <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2024/housing-and-homelessness/homelessness-services>

¹⁵ NSW Government funding estimates have been sourced from the NSW Legal Aid 2023-24 Annual Report (for court advocacy services) and data provided by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) (for all other programs). Where funding information for a program is only available for 2023-24, it is assumed that the same level of funding is being delivered in 2024-25.

¹⁶ A total of \$37.4 million for these three programs, according to data supplied by DCJ.

¹⁷ Assuming 2.5 per cent annual inflation, plus population growth based on projections using medium assumptions from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023), "Population Projections, Australia", Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/population-projections-australia/latest-release>

A separate approach has been used for two programs:

- **Men's Behaviour Change Programs** – Service provider No To Violence has estimated an extra \$15.2 million in funding is required each year from the NSW Government to clear waitlists, fill location gaps and raise all locations to best practice.¹⁸ Such funding could help to address significant gaps in service provision.
- **Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services** – the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program estimates that an additional \$42 million a year is required to roll-out police co-location to 57 locations across the State, as well as a further \$11 million to provide more Hearing Support workers and one full-time identified Aboriginal Hearing Support worker at each site.

The additional funding amounts for each of these programs shown in the table below have also been adjusted to allow for inflation and population growth (applied to the total funding amount for each program).

Program	Current funding allocated for 2024-25 \$m ¹⁹	Additional funding needed in 2025-26 \$m
Domestic Violence Response Enhancement	11.6	6.5
Women's services/refuges	110.4	61.8
Staying Home Leaving Violence	20.3	21.6
Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services	6.4	5.6
Men's Behaviour Change Programs	11.5	16.3
Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services	32.7	45.0
Specialist Workers for Children and Young People	11.5	6.4
Total	204.4	163.1

	2025-26 \$m	2026-27 \$m	2027-28 \$m	2028-29 \$m
Fiscal impact				
Total baseline funding	367.5	381.8	396.4	411.2
Increase relative to 2024-25	163.1	177.4	192.0	206.8

¹⁸ SBS News (2024), "Violent men seeking help waiting months for services, compromising safety of women", 2 May, Available: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/violent-men-seeking-help-waiting-months-for-services-compromising-safety-of-women/3g2d1ukxp>

¹⁹ Based on data provided by DCJ. Where a funding amounts for 2024-25 were not provided, we have assumed that funding would remain at 2023-24 levels.

Policy 2: Brokerage funding

An increase in brokerage funding of at least 50 per cent would be reasonable to ensure flexible, client-centred responses to individuals experiencing domestic and family violence. Brokerage funding allows services to address immediate client needs, such as temporary accommodation, transport, or emergency financial assistance. However, currently many services lack the funding they need in order to adequately assist clients and help them to access essential services and supports. Enhanced brokerage allocations will enable services to meet these needs more consistently, reducing the strain on individuals navigating crises.

Methodology

Evidence from organisations in the DFV sector highlights a particular challenge relating to brokerage funding. Of the 17 providers surveyed by DVNSW:

- only one service indicated that it had sufficient funding to cover brokerage needs;
- three services indicated that 100 per cent of brokerage needs were unfunded;
- a regional service which operates across three locations indicated that 50 per cent of its brokerage needs are unmet;
- an urban service reported that 20 per cent of clients have unmet brokerage needs;
- a regional service was only funded (under the Staying Home Leaving Violence program) for half the number of occasions it needed to provide brokerage last financial year.

Several services raised concerns that contracted requirements for brokerage spending were inflexible and diminished the efficacy of service provision. For example, brokerage funding in the Staying Home Leaving Violence program is allocated as a fixed amount to be spent on each client, which does not reflect the reality that some clients require little or no brokerage while others require significant support.

More flexible brokerage arrangements would benefit services and clients, allowing services to allocate funding to clients with the greatest need as opposed to the limitation of a specific funding amount applied to all clients, regardless of need.

In addition, many services currently do not receive government funding for brokerage, and assist clients by pooling brokerage from fundraising and philanthropic donations, or by referring them to other services who may have greater capacity to assist them.

Based on the survey responses, it would be reasonable to ask for a **50 to 100 per cent increase** in total brokerage funding.

Using the survey data, we estimate that currently brokerage funding is about 4.5 per cent of total NSW Government funding. In 2024-25, this equates to about \$9 million (across the funding programs listed in above in the baseline funding discussion).

If brokerage funding was increased by 50 per cent, it would need to be 6.8 per cent of total funding (or equivalently, a 2.3 per cent increase in total funding). Combined with the 50 per cent increase in baseline funding, this would mean about \$8.3 million in additional funding for brokerage, or a total allocation of about \$25 million.

	2025-26 \$m	2026-27 \$m	2027-28 \$m	2028-29 \$m
Additional funding for brokerage	8.3	8.6	8.9	9.3

Policy 3: Regional services

Taking into account service delivery costs as well as the greater incidence of domestic and family violence in regional and remote areas of New South Wales, Impact Economics and Policy estimates that services operating in inner and outer regional areas would require about 2 to 4 times the funding levels of services in major cities (per person in the general population), and services in remote and very remote areas would need almost 9 times the funding levels, to operate sustainably and to meet the need for services.

Regional service delivery costs—multiple of costs in major cities, per head of general population

Remoteness level	Cost of delivering a given level of services	Greater demand for services	Combined impact – regional loadings
Inner Regional	1.16x	1.90x	2.21x
Outer regional	1.16x	3.16x	3.66x
Remote	1.20x	7.45x	8.94x
Very remote	1.20x	7.45x	8.94x

All DFV services operating in regional and remote areas should receive a loading in their funding arrangements which reflects the combined impact shown in the table above. This loading should be applied based on the total population in the service's catchment area.

Due to a lack of data on current service delivery levels and funding by remoteness level, as well as data on levels of unmet demand in regional and rural areas, it has not been possible to estimate the total additional funding required.

Methodology

DFV services are significantly more costly to deliver in regional and remote parts of New South Wales. The cost challenges faced by services operating outside of major cities include:

- Significantly higher rates of DFV, with per-capita rates of domestic violence related assaults recorded by Police about 70 per cent higher in inner regional areas, 2.5 times higher in outer regional areas, and over 6 times higher in remote areas (compared to major cities);²⁰
- Greater difficulty attracting and retaining staff on the wages services can afford to offer;
- Greater cost of supplying staff accommodation and vehicles;
- Higher travel costs, including direct expenses (e.g. fuel) and staff time, with staff taken away from frontline service delivery;

²⁰ Impact Economics and Policy analysis of [BOSCAR domestic violence statistics](#) by Local Government Area, using remoteness classifications from the NSW Local Government Grants Commission.

- Higher brokerage costs to support clients to access specialist services, especially when they need to travel for several hours to the nearest regional centre;
- Reduced access to staff training and professional development;
- Unique health and safety challenges, including issues with exposure to natural disasters and phone black spots;
- Higher heating and cooling costs due to local climatic conditions.

It is unclear how the significant cost differences between metro and regional services are currently factored into funding arrangements. Going forward, all DFV operating in regional and remote parts of New South Wales should be provided with additional funding—on top of base funding—to reflect the additional costs they face.

Various estimates from other sectors are available to show how the cost of delivering a given volume or type of services varies by remoteness area, as shown in the table below. For example, the NSW Government recently published figures showing that the provision of child protection services costs about 16 per cent higher in inner and outer regional areas, and 20 per cent higher in remote and very remote areas (compared to major cities).

Estimates of differences in costs of service delivery in regional and remote areas – multiple of costs in major cities

Remoteness level	NSW submission to CGC ²¹	CGC proposal ²²	IHACPA patient residential remoteness area adjustments ²³
Inner Regional	1.16x	1.03x	1.00x
Outer regional	1.16x	1.07x	1.07x
Remote	1.20x	1.22x	1.20x
Very remote	1.20x	1.45x	1.33x

In addition to these higher costs of delivering services, there is much greater need for domestic violence services in regional and remote areas due to significantly higher rates of violence, as shown in the table below. These figures do not capture the significant amount of violence and harm that is not reported to Police, which may also be higher in regional and remote areas than in major cities.

²¹ NSW Government submission to the Commonwealth Grants Commission 2025 GST Methodology Review, Tranche 2 Consultation, March 2024, p. 103.

²² Commonwealth Grants Commission, *2025 Methodology Review*, Draft Report, Geography chapter, p. 7.

²³ Used for hospital funding calculations in relation to admitted acute, admitted subacute and non-acute, admitted mental health care or non-admitted patients. Independent Health and Aged Care Pricing Authority, *National Efficient Price Determination 2024-25*, p. 14.

Domestic violence related incidents reported to Police, 2023-24				
Remoteness level	Domestic violence assaults²⁴	Breaches of Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders	Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders commenced	Combined impact – multiple of major cities²⁵
	Incidents per 100,000 population			
Major cities	342	178	478	-
Inner Regional	582	385	882	1.90x
Outer regional	864	707	1422	3.16x
Remote	2118	1571	3513	7.45x
Very remote	-	-	-	7.45x
NSW average	457	297	680	

²⁴ Incident data sourced from [BOSCAR domestic violence statistics](#)

²⁵ Estimated Impact Economic and Policy based on indexing each region to the major cities average for each incident type, then taking the simple average across the three incident types. Very remote areas are assumed to have the same value as remote areas, as data is not published for the three local government areas (LGAs) classified as very remote (Bourke, Brewarrina and Central Darling). For other LGAs without reported values, the average of other LGAs in the same remoteness category has been used.

Policy 4: Migrant and refugee services

To enable specialist DFV services to better meet the needs of migrants and refugees escaping DFV, Impact Economics and Policy estimates that specialist DFV services for these populations would cost roughly 2.2 times more than mainstream DFV services. This is an average loading that could be adjusted on a region-by-region basis in line with the share of the population that was born in a majority non-English speaking country and arrived in Australia in the last 10 years (using Census data or other sources).

Specialist migrant/refugee services—multiple of costs of mainstream services, per head of general population

Sub-group	Population share	Cost loadings
NESB migrants (permanent resident or citizen) who arrived in Australia in the last 10 years	6%	1.5x
Temporary visa holders (excluding New Zealand citizens)	6%	3.0x
Combined	12%	2.2x

Due to a lack of data on current service delivery levels and funding for specialist migrant/refugee services and workers, as well as data on unmet demand for these services, it has not been possible to estimate the total additional funding required.

Methodology

There is significant unmet demand for support by migrant and refugee women and children escaping family violence, with an estimated one in three migrant and refugee women in Australia having experienced DFV, a higher rate than the general population.²⁶

These women and children may face unique cultural pressures that make it more difficult to escape violence or reach out for help, as well as barriers to accessing mainstream DFV services where they may not feel culturally safe or are unable to access support in their preferred language. Those who are in Australia on temporary visas (e.g. asylum seekers, students and temporary workers) may have very limited social support networks in Australia and are often excluded from mainstream and other health services.

Appropriately trained specialist staff and DFV agencies are well placed to provide appropriate support and assistance to these women and children. However, currently there is too little funding for services to be able to hire these staff and deliver these specialist services to the extent that is required. Greater funding specifically for migrant and refugee services would allow much greater outreach to women and

²⁶ Segrave, M., Wickes, R. and Keel, C. (2021), *Migrant and refugee women in Australia: The safety and security survey*, Monash University.

children in need, and support dedicated resources in existing facilities to deliver culturally sensitive casework, interpreters, and community education programs.

Specialist DFV services for migrant and refugee populations are also more complex and costly to deliver than general DFV services. Services who participated in the DVNSW survey which currently focus on these populations noted that costs are higher for a range of reasons, including:

- Greater complexity of casework, which requires a greater time commitment per client;
- Higher accommodation costs (for specialist homelessness services), as affordable accommodation is harder to find and so clients stay longer;
- Almost all clients have children who also require support;
- Clients generally need greater assistance to access health, legal and consular services, as well as to pay for basic necessities (such as food or schooling), which requires greater caseworker time and brokerage.

Services estimate that providing specialist DFV services to migrant/refugee populations can cost around **1.5 to 2 times** as much as non-migrant/refugee clients.

In addition, a significant portion of clients are asylum seekers or temporary visa holders (an estimated one third to two thirds of all migrant/refugee clients). These clients can cost up to twice as much to support compared to clients who have permanent residency.

Estimating the target population

To estimate the approximate size of the migrant/refugee population who are likely to benefit most from having access to specialist DFV services, Impact Economics and Policy has constructed a proxy measure based on the number of people in New South Wales who are recent migrants from majority non-English speaking countries, and available estimates on the number of temporary visa holders (excluding New Zealand citizens on special visa arrangements). This is a rough proxy of the target population. It is noted that some individuals in these groups may be able and willing to access support from more generally available DFV services, while some individuals falling outside these groups (e.g. migrants who have been in Australia for a longer period, or who are New Zealand citizens) may require specialist DFV support that is tailored to their cultural and linguistic needs.

Roughly 23 per cent of the NSW population—more than one in five people—was born overseas in a majority non-English speaking country. Just over a third of these migrants arrived in Australia in the 10 years prior to the 2021 Census.²⁷

²⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census, Tablebuilder.

Very limited data is available on temporary visa holders. Recent analysis from the ABS, drawing on the 2021 Census and other sources,²⁸ revealed there were almost 500,000 temporary visa holders living in New South Wales (with 85 per cent of these in Sydney). Excluding New Zealand citizens, an estimated 300,000 temporary visa holders were living in New South Wales. Most of these (84 per cent) were born in majority non-English-speaking countries.

However, as the 2021 Census was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when international borders closed, these figures are likely to be a significant underestimate the number of temporary visa holders currently living in NSW. Since 2021, there has been a 70 per cent increase in the number of temporary visa holders in Australia.²⁹

Using the above figures, Impact Economics and Policy estimates that there are currently about 509,000 recent NESB migrants with permanent residency or citizenship living in NSW (that is, migrants who arrived in Australia in the last 10 years, but are not temporary visa holders). In addition, there are an estimated 497,000 temporary visa holders (excluding New Zealand citizens), representing a further 6 per cent of the population.

In total, this means about 12 per cent of the population is either a recent NESB migrant and/or temporary visa holder.

Estimating loadings

The loadings for migrant/refugee services have been estimated by assuming that migrant and refugee services receive a share of total baseline funding in line with the migrant/refugee population shares in a given region, plus an additional cost uplift which reflects that service delivery for temporary visa holders costs 3.0 times general costs, and service delivery for other migrant/refugee populations costs 1.5 times general costs.

Ideally, loadings for migrant/refugee services would also take account of higher rates of DFV among the relevant population (similar to the way the regional loadings were calculated above). However, as directly comparable estimates of rates of DFV in migrant/refugee populations versus the general population are not available, this has not been factored into the estimates. Accordingly, the estimated loadings are conservative.

²⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023), "Temporary visa holders in Australia", Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/temporary-visa-holders-australia/latest-release>

²⁹ Department of Home Affairs (2024), "Temporary visa holders in Australia", Available: <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/temporary-entrants-visa-holders>