

ENDING VIOLENCE IN REGIONAL AND REMOTE NSW

A report based on Domestic Violence
NSW's 2025 Regional Forum



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. Domestic Violence NSW 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.



Our thanks

Domestic Violence NSW extends our deepest gratitude to the members who attended our 2025 Regional Forum in Armidale, representing communities across NSW, including the Central West, Illawarra, Hunter, Mid-North Coast, Murrumbidgee, North-Western, Northern, and Richmond-Tweed regions. Without their contributions, this report would not exist. It was truly inspiring to hear about the incredible work and innovative, place-based programs that specialist services are delivering every day, deeply embedded in and supporting their local communities. This report amplifies the voices of our regional and remote members, honouring the knowledge, partnerships, and lived experiences that drive effective, locally led responses to end domestic and family violence in regional and remote communities.

About Us

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

DVNSW members represent the diversity of NSW specialist DFV 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 DFV 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 DFV impacts some communities disproportionately – which is why we ensure the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ+ 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.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgement	2
Our thanks	2
About us	2
Contents	3
Executive summary	4
Recommendations	6
Increase in core funding for frontline services including regional and remote loadings	8
Investing in place-based funding models	11
Investing in regional housing solutions	12
Addressing workforce challenges and enhancing capacity	14
Improving access to the justice system	18
Disaster management and recovery	19
Funding place-based primary prevention initiatives	20
Engaging with perpetrators	21
Conclusion	22
References	22
Glossary	23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In July 2025, Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) convened its Regional Forum in Armidale, New England, bringing together 80 members, 60 in-person and 20 online, from across NSW's regional, rural and remote communities. The forum provided a critical platform for specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services to share lived realities, service pressures and community-driven solutions to end violence in regional and remote NSW.

Regional and remote areas of NSW experience significantly higher rates of DFV. The highest recorded regional DFV rate is in New England and North West NSW, at 705.2 per 100,000 – more than six times higher than the highest metropolitan region, North Sydney and Hornsby. Towns in western NSW like Moree, Walgett and Bourke report DFV levels over five times the state average (BOCSAR 2024). Impact Economics and Policy demonstrate prevalence of domestic violence-related incidents significantly increases with remoteness in NSW, with remote and very remote regions experiencing incidents at rates 7.45 times higher than major cities (DVNSW 2024).

These high rates of DFV stem from deeply rooted structural inequalities. A severe housing shortage forces many victim-survivors to remain with perpetrators, while limited transport options, digital isolation, and a lack of safe courtrooms make it even harder to seek help. Additionally, higher rates of gun ownership and a strong sense of privacy create further barriers, compelling women to stay in violent relationships (Woods 2023). Regional service providers are responding to unprecedented demand, often operating several times above their funded capacity. A recent survey of fourteen regional and remote member services found that DFV services operated at almost 300% of their funded capacity for 2024–25. (Domestic Violence NSW 2025)

A quote from a survey respondent servicing part of Central West, Western, Central North and Far West NSW, highlighting the impact of rising demand on services:

“Referral rates are steadily increasing. Services are consistently exceeding their contracted KPIs; however, no additional funding is provided for this additional work. This means frontline staff carry the pressure of meeting community need without the resourcing to match. The

situation is compounded by workforce shortages, high turnover risk, and the emotional toll of responding to complex trauma in regional and remote contexts”.

DVNSW members at the Regional Forum identified a number of systemic reforms that are essential to addressing these inequities. Services urgently require increased and equitable funding that recognises the higher cost and complexity of delivering support in regional and remote communities.

Members called for:

- Investment in place-based models that value local leadership, partnerships, and cultural knowledge.
- A coordinated disaster management framework that embeds DFV responses.
- Urgent action to increase housing options.
- Safer, more accessible justice infrastructure.

The workforce was a key focus of the Regional Forum and remain the backbone of regional DFV service delivery. Members highlighted the need for:

- Affordable housing for the DFV workforce,
- Improved attraction and retention strategies,
- Sustainable remuneration,
- Professional supervision,
- Funded career pathways, particularly for Aboriginal, multicultural, and lived-experience workers.

The forum also reinforced the importance of resourcing community-led primary prevention and perpetrator intervention programs to reduce violence before it occurs and to shift responsibility to those who use violence.

DVNSW calls on the NSW Government to commit to a 50% increase in core funding for all specialist DFV services, with a supplementary payment for regional and remote services to recognise the additional costs and demand drivers related to service delivery in these locations. This must be coupled with investment in housing including operational support, workforce development, culturally safe practice, and primary prevention to ensure every person in NSW – no matter where they live – can access safety, justice, and support.

Recommendations

Domestic Violence NSW calls on the NSW Government to:

Recommendation 1

Prioritise a 50 per cent core funding increase for all specialist domestic and family violence services and provide an additional supplementary payment to those operating in regional, rural and remote NSW.

Recommendation 2

Invest in place-based funding models that recognise local expertise and empower community-led support and collaboration.

Recommendation 3

Increase the social housing target to at least 10% of occupied residential dwellings by 2050, prioritising regional and remote communities, with 50% of new supply allocated to women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 4

Ring-fence a portion of social housing for transitional use (up to three years) for women and children exiting refuges and fund the wrap-around operational support required to sustain it, including for forthcoming transitional homes delivered via the National Housing Infrastructure Facility.

Recommendation 5

Expand employment pathways for regional and remote services by implementing targeted graduate programs, subsidising TAFE qualifications, and establishing pathways to employment through student placements.

Recommendation 6

Fund workforce well-being initiatives to address the risk of vicarious trauma and burnout, including funding for access to clinical supervision for all staff.

Recommendation 7

Classify the domestic and family violence workforce as essential and prioritise their eligibility under forthcoming essential-worker housing initiatives, with specific allocations for regional and remote NSW.

Recommendation 8

Increase funding for the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Development Strategy (2025-2035)* to build capacity for the regional and remote workforce to provide culturally responsive support to migrant and refugee women, culturally safe support to Aboriginal women and families, appropriate support to women and children with disability and LGBTQIA+ women.

Recommendation 9

Upgrade regional and remote courthouses with safe rooms and audio-visual link (AVL) facilities and ensure all police stations are equipped with AVL technology, so that victim-survivors can safely and confidently give evidence without facing their perpetrators.

Recommendation 10

Integrate domestic and family violence responses into all NSW Government disaster management plans, ensuring evacuation procedures prioritise the safety of victim survivors.

Recommendation 11

Provide sustained funding to specialised DFV services to ensure they can maintain service delivery and support during disaster management and recovery.

Recommendation 12

Increase funding for place-based primary prevention initiatives tailored to the needs of regional and remote communities.

Recommendation 13

Increase funding for Men's Behaviour Change Programs to expand access across regional and remote communities.

Increase in core funding for frontline services including regional and remote loadings

Recommendation 1

The NSW Government must prioritise a 50 per cent core funding increase for all specialist domestic and family violence services and provide an additional supplementary payment to those operating in regional, rural and remote NSW to recognise increased costs of operating in these areas.

The Regional Forum highlighted the urgent need to increase core funding for frontline specialist DFV services. Services in regional and remote NSW are operating at extraordinary levels above their funded capacity to meet escalating demand. Members shared anecdotes of staff working outside of their job descriptions to support clients to keep them safe. This includes supplying tents when they had nowhere safe to live, providing their own money for vouchers, and supporting waitlisted clients with safety planning. Members reported that services continue to experience long waitlists for client safety upgrades, limited access to trades, and poor mobile and internet connectivity. These issues significantly hinder case coordination and the ability to provide timely, effective support.

A recent survey of DVNSW members revealed unprecedented demand for specialist response program Domestic Violence Response Enhancement (DVRE) across several regions in the 2024-25 reporting period. DVRE provides after hours crisis support to women and children fleeing DFV with rapid response short-term accommodation including wrap-around support.

Survey data shows DVRE services in regional NSW are operating at unsustainable levels. One regional DVRE service was funded to support 28 clients but assisted 255 – more than 800% over capacity. Another is funded to provide support to 32 clients and has supported 328 – 925% over capacity. On average, DVRE services across regional NSW that responded to the survey are operating at 310% over capacity (see Appendix 2 from the DVNSW 2025).

Just because services are pushing themselves to operate at capacities far beyond what they are

funded to do, it doesn't mean that they should or can continue to do so. The implications of this are increased burnout and vicarious trauma, workforce retention issues, and reduced quality of care and serious safety implications for victim-survivors. These figures highlight the urgent need for increased investment in core funding to meet demand, to ensure women and children in regional and remote NSW can access safe, timely, and life-saving support when they need it most.

Please see the DVNSW Pre-Budget Submission, 2026-27 for further data, evidence and member case studies highlighting the need for a 50% baseline funding increase.

The need for a supplementary payment for regional and remote services

Delivering DFV services in regional and remote parts of NSW involves significantly higher costs due to the unique challenges posed by geographic isolation, limited infrastructure and workforce constraints.

Members highlighted the additional costs to deliver services including:

- Higher travel costs, including outreach and direct expenses such as fuel and staff time, with less time available for frontline service delivery due to time spent travelling.
- Higher brokerage costs to support clients to access specialist services, especially when they need to travel for several hours to the nearest regional centre.
- Significantly higher rates of DFV – compared to major cities, per-capita rates of DV-related assaults recorded by police are six times higher in remote areas (BOCSAR 2024).

- Greater difficulty attracting and retaining staff in lower population areas and on the wages services can afford to offer. Competition from government services and other industries also impacts.

Domestic Violence NSW recommends the NSW Government use modelling by Impact Economics and Policy (2024) on the costs of service delivery in regional and remote areas of NSW as a guide to calculate a supplementary payment. Impact Economics and Policy (2024) estimates that,

due to higher service delivery costs and greater incidence of domestic and family violence in regional and remote areas of NSW, 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.

Case study

This case study is from a rural service operating a women's refuge and outreach program. It highlights the growing service demand and the impact that inadequate funding has on staff, service delivery, and clients:

"We are completely inundated at present. New intakes are occurring daily, and our service is struggling to keep up with demand. The uncertainty surrounding recommissioning has left staff feeling nervous and uneasy, making it difficult to manage the service effectively. It is near impossible to plan for relocation or ensure job security when the future remains unclear.

At the same time, we are preparing for reaccreditation, a significant undertaking in itself, while frontline expectations continue to grow. Despite these pressures, we are supporting an overwhelming number of women and children in need. Many of our clients are not only experiencing DFV but they are also facing homelessness and unable to afford basic essentials, leaving our already underfunded service constantly stretched financially.

We are in a small rural country town and our service always steps up to fill the gaps that naturally exist in these areas, but we do struggle and although we are incredibly resourceful and still manage fantastic outcomes, it comes at a cost with staff burnout being the number one concern.

The housing crisis has further escalated the issue, forcing many into homelessness or into unsafe, overcrowded living situations, which in turn contributes to higher rates of DFV. The reality is the outcomes aren't there. The homes are not there. Refuges are fuller for longer and the impact is devastating".

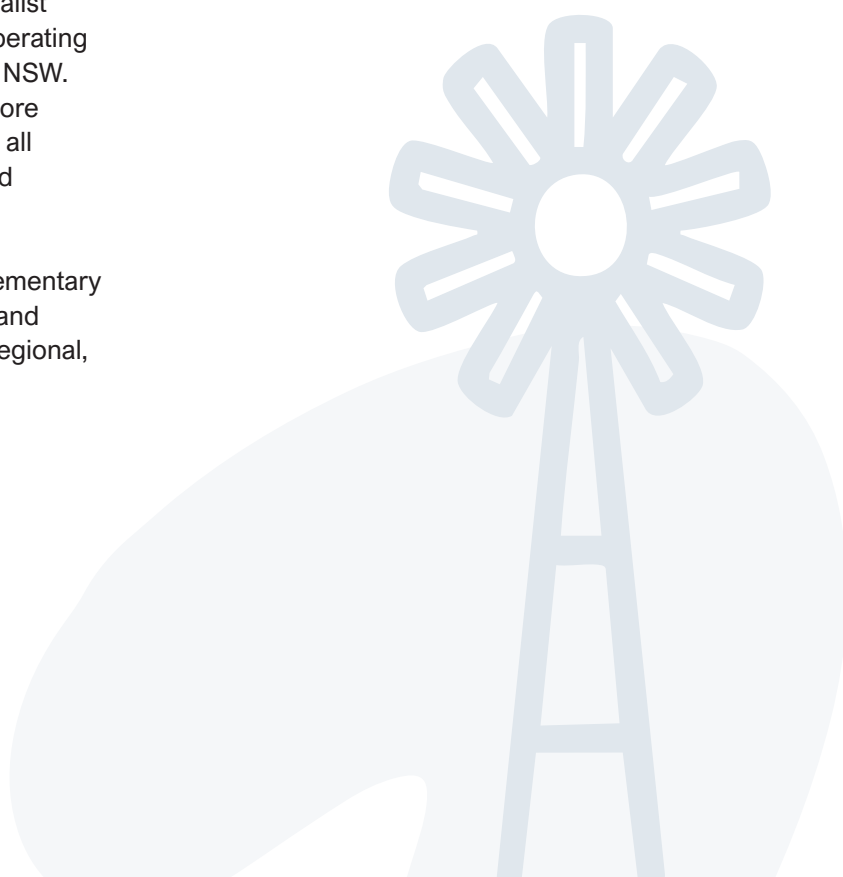
Table 1: Estimated additional regional service delivery costs in NSW by remoteness (Impact Economics and Policy 2024).

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

While it is unclear how the significant cost differences between metro and regional services are currently factored into government funding arrangements, DVNSW recommends that all DFV services operating in regional and remote parts of NSW be provided with additional funding beyond core funding to account for the higher costs they face.

Domestic Violence NSW recommends that the NSW Government make a supplementary payment for the next two financial years (2026-27 and 2027-28) to all DCJ-funded specialist domestic and family violence services operating in regional, rural and remote locations in NSW. This funding must be in addition to any core funding increase. Regardless of location, all specialist DFV services have experienced stagnant core funding levels which are addressed by the 50% uplift outlined in Recommendation 1. The call for a supplementary payment addresses the additional costs and demand faced by services operating in regional, rural and remote NSW.

Increasing core funding by at least 50% and providing additional supplementary payments for regional and remote services will ensure these essential, life-saving supports can operate safely, sustainably, and effectively.



Investing in place-based funding models

Recommendation 2

The NSW Government must invest in place-based funding models that empower community-led support and collaboration.

DVNSW members reported that competitive funding models are damaging to local communities. Smaller but well-established community-based organisations are often required to compete with larger, national or metro-based organisations that have significantly more resources, such as dedicated grant writers and administrative infrastructure.

While the current NSW Government recommissioning approach for five-year contracts (2026–2031) is non-competitive, DVNSW urges that all future new funding processes and commissioning processes for the 2031–2036 cycle, be grounded in place-based, community-led models that prioritise local expertise and leadership.

Organisations embedded in their local communities know what their communities need and how to provide appropriate services. They also have established relationships with allied services in the area that can help to provide integrated support for victim-survivors. When funding is awarded to non-local providers, there is a risk that services become less responsive and less accessible to those who need them most. Funding local DFV or community-based local services mean that women and children are far more likely to receive tailored responses to meet their needs and the needs of community.

A quote from a DVNSW member at the regional forum:

“If there is an existing DFV service in town, just fund them, and make them great, and hold them accountable.”

Community-designed models like Armidale's Trackside Youth Hub show what's possible when local voices lead. Launching in December 2025, Trackside will be an unfunded, co-located hub that aims to bring multiple services together in one accessible place. Built through collaboration, it combines local resources to deliver wraparound support tailored to local young people. Women's Shelter Armidale will extend its outreach through Trackside by establishing a transitional clinic – building on services it currently delivers in-house – to address the health needs of young people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. The Shelter's Food Project, delivered through Trackside, provides more than 400 meals each week to people facing food insecurity, many of them young people. This is an innovative example of what can be achieved through local collaboration.

Investment in place-based, locally-led models of support, co-designed with lived experts, will ensure programs are designed by the local community for the local community. This will result in individualised, person-centred supports that respond to the unique needs of each client and their local context.

Investing in regional housing solutions

Recommendation 3

The NSW Government must increase the social housing target to at least 10% of occupied residential dwellings by 2050, prioritising regional and remote communities, with 50% of new supply allocated to women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

Access to safe, long-term, and affordable housing in regional and remote communities remains at crisis levels. DVNSW members have consistently raised this issue across DVNSW regional forums. Members report that many victim-survivors are forced to live in their cars and stay mobile to avoid detection by perpetrators. Others face the impossible choice between returning to violence or becoming homeless (Equity Economics 2021). Women and children are staying in refuges for extended periods – months or even years – due to a lack of exit pathways into stable housing.

Frontline workers identify this as one of the most frustrating and disheartening aspects of their work:

“Having to tell a woman or mother with children to wait for housing, knowing full well that ‘waiting’ in her situation could mean going back to a dangerous situation with the perpetrator. This is the reality we face every day.”

Natural disasters have compounded existing housing challenges in regional communities. The impact of the floods in 2022 and 2025 in Northern NSW continues to severely limit the availability of long-term and affordable housing. The lack of sustainable housing options remains a critical issue in many regions.

The housing shortage often forces victim-survivors to leave their communities, support networks, and Country.

For Aboriginal women, this dislocation severs cultural ties and increases risk of returning to unsafe environments:

“A big issue is housing. Telling Aboriginal women to leave their land, mob and kin disregards their cultural wellbeing and safety.”

While DVNSW welcomes the NSW Government’s investment in social housing, current targets are insufficient to meet demand, especially in regional and remote areas. The rising cost of living, increased rents and mortgage rates, and stagnant wages continue to push more people into homelessness. In 2023–24, less than 2% of clients supported by the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) system secured long-term housing (AIHW, 2025).

The NSW Government must increase its social housing target to at least 10% of occupied residential dwellings by 2050 to address the housing crisis. Housing should be prioritised in regional and remote areas with 50% allocated to women and children experiencing DFV. Additionally, it is important that the housing incorporate universal access and offer flexible design options, including modular homes and dual-key layouts, to better meet diverse needs.

Further, housing affordability for workers was raised as a key issue at the forum. Please see section on addressing workforce challenges below which includes discussion on housing for essential workers.

Recommendation 4

The NSW Government must ring-fence a portion of social housing for transitional use (up to three years) for women and children exiting refuges and fund the wrap-around operational support required to sustain it, including for forthcoming transitional homes delivered via the National Housing Infrastructure Facility.

DVNSW members in regional and remote areas consistently emphasised the urgent need for more transitional housing. Many victim-survivors nearing the end of their refuge support period are ineligible for social housing due to income thresholds or anticipated return to work. In parallel, competition in the private rental market renders access nearly impossible. A lack of accessible properties adds to the difficulty of an already near impossible situation – impacting on women and children with disability and older women with access needs. These factors make it extremely difficult to secure housing for women exiting refuges, particularly in regional and remote communities where the housing crisis is more acute.

A quote from a DVNSW member highlighting the need for increased access to transitional housing:

“Funding and support for transitional housing is critical. We are struggling in our area and we’re losing housing stock, with very few options for clients exiting our refuge. Transitional [housing] is so important to give families the chance to start healing and building their life again without being in crisis.”

DVNSW welcomes the Commonwealth National Housing Infrastructure Facility (NHIF) funding of approximately \$330 million for NSW for the delivery of crisis and transitional housing for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence and young people experiencing homelessness. Further, DVNSW supports the NSW Government’s intention to focus on the delivery of transitional housing, given the recent significant investment in Core and Cluster crisis accommodation. Operational funding, however, must also be considered. It is essential alongside

transitional housing to ensure women and children receive ongoing support from specialist services beyond the housing itself.

Transitional housing, paired with operational funding for wrap-around support, is crucial as it allows women and children time to begin to recover from the trauma and move forward with their lives in a safe and supported environment. However, transitional housing rarely becomes available due to the medium-term nature of stays (typically 18 months to three years) with only 1,500 transitional properties in the Homes NSW portfolio, most of which are located in metropolitan areas. This leaves many victim-survivors in regional and remote communities at heightened risk of homelessness or returning to the perpetrator.

The NSW Government should ring-fence a portion of social housing for transitional use and fund the wrap-around operational support required to sustain it, including for forthcoming transitional homes delivered via the National Housing Infrastructure Facility. This will increase exit pathways from refuges and support women and children into stable housing with wrap-around support.

Prioritising transitional housing and providing funding for operational support in regional and rural areas, especially where the new Core and Cluster refuges are being built, will help create critical exit pathways where they are most needed.

Due to the shortage of transitional and long-term housing, demand for safe temporary accommodation (TA) in regional and remote NSW has increased. DVNSW supports the NSW Government’s commitment to move away from motel-style TA toward accommodation that includes wrap-around support within the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) system. This shift must not reduce TA availability in regional and remote areas, where supply is already critically low and demand is increasing.

Addressing workforce challenges and enhancing capacity

Recommendation 5

The NSW Government must expand employment pathways for regional and remote services by implementing targeted graduate programs, subsidising TAFE qualifications, and establishing pathways to employment in the DFV sector through student placements.

Recommendation 6

The NSW Government must fund workforce well-being initiatives to address the risk of vicarious trauma and burnout, including funding for access to clinical supervision for all staff.

During a workforce-focused session at the DVNSW Regional Forum, members identified a number of best practice approaches to support workforce development. Sustained government investment is essential to establish clear employment pathways and effective retention strategies across regional and remote NSW. Ensuring staff safety and well-being must be central to these efforts.

To gain deeper insight into regional and remote workforce strengths and challenges, DVNSW conducted a live survey during the Regional Forum.

Key findings include:

Workforce priorities

Services identified their top priorities for the workforce over the next five years:

- Training and career development (37%)
- Resourcing (31%)
- Wellbeing and inclusion (24%)
- Workforce attraction and retention (8%)

Key workforce attraction challenges

Members responded to statements identifying workforce attraction challenges for key staffing cohorts, with the following results:

- 71% of services said attracting multicultural and bi-lingual staff to the workforce was a challenge (18% were unsure and 10% thought it wasn't a challenge).
- 55% of services said attracting Aboriginal staff was a challenge (6% were unsure and 39% thought it wasn't a challenge).
- 64% of services said it was a challenge providing an accessible workplace for staff with disabilities (22% were unsure and 14% said it wasn't a challenge).
- 67% of services said minimum role qualifications present an obstacle to recruiting appropriately qualified staff (18% said it wasn't a challenge and 14% were unsure).

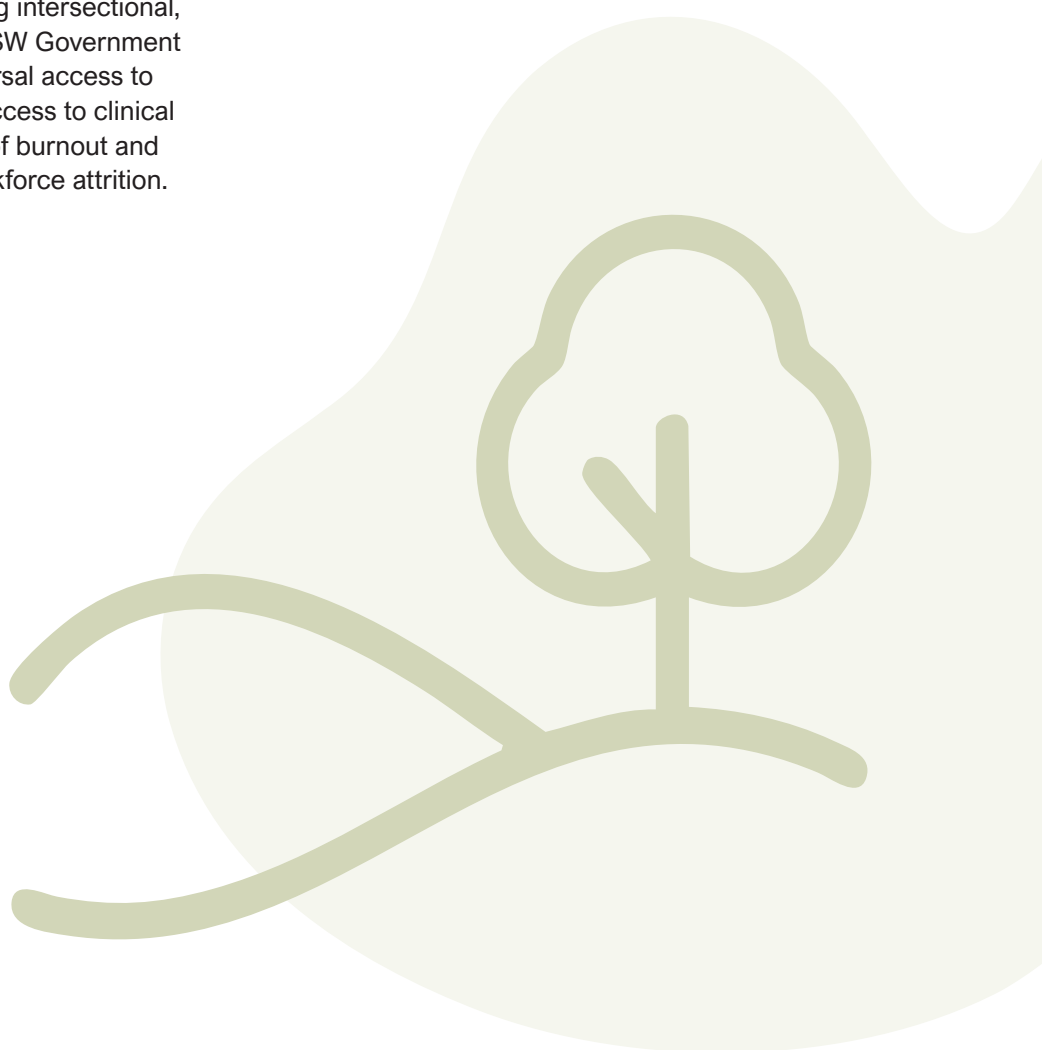
Barriers to workforce sustainability

Members identified several barriers to attracting and retaining staff including:

- Low pay and less paid leave compared to government jobs (services said they would like to pay their staff more but cannot afford to due to the high cost of service delivery in regional and remote areas).
- Staff leaving the sector due to burnout caused by high caseloads, vicarious trauma, unsustainable ratio of demand to workers, lack of paid clinical supervision.

- Lack of training and development and clear career pathways (many services would like to offer more training but lack budget to prioritise this – backfilling staff on training is part of this challenge, especially in periods of high demand).
- Minimum qualification requirements (67% of services identified this as a key challenge in recruiting staff).
- Cultural safety and colonial load for Aboriginal workers in some organisations.
- “Role creep” where bi-cultural and bi-lingual workers take on unacknowledged responsibilities (e.g., translation, cultural mediation) without formal recognition or compensation.
- Lack of childcare placements available in regional and remote areas.

While the recently launched NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Development Strategy 2025–2035 recognises the need for a supervision and coaching framework including intersectional, culturally safe supervision, the NSW Government must commit to funding for universal access to clinical supervision for all staff. Access to clinical supervision will mitigate the risk of burnout and vicarious trauma and reduce workforce attrition.



Recommendation 7

The NSW Government must classify the domestic and family violence workforce as essential and prioritise their eligibility under forthcoming essential-worker housing initiatives, with specific allocations for regional and remote NSW.

The lack of affordable housing for staff in some regions was raised several times during the Regional Forum. This is due to post-pandemic rising rents, competition for housing from workers in other industries (both permanent and project-based workers) and many properties sitting vacant while used for holiday and short-term rentals. One regional service reported delaying a new hire's start date for months because the worker could not secure accommodation. The NSW Government must classify the DFV workforce as essential and prioritise their eligibility under forthcoming essential-worker housing initiatives, with specific allocations for regional and remote NSW.

Strengths and Innovative Solutions

Despite the challenges outlined above, members shared stories that highlighted resilience and a strong sense of community connection – key assets in building and sustaining the local workforce. One example from a member involved a volunteer progressing to a paid casual support role and eventually becoming a team leader.

Some examples of innovative approaches outlined by DVNSW members include:

- Peer worker programs and pathways to support people with lived expertise into employment.
- Traineeships and subsidies for VET and TAFE qualifications including clear pathways for student placements into employment.
- Flexibility of work arrangements (particularly for those with caring responsibilities).
- Ongoing training and development opportunities including establishing partnerships with training providers such as the NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence.
- Opportunities for regional and remote services to join communities of practice that reflect the current practice issues and needs of local communities.

- More targeted roles e.g. identified Aboriginal positions, or bi-lingual/bicultural positions.
- Supportive and reflective internal supervision and access to paid external supervision.
- Staff wellbeing days, team building initiatives, paid birthday leave.

Investing in subsidised TAFE qualifications, coupled with structured student placement pathways into employment, will help build a sustainable pipeline of skilled workers in regional and remote areas. In addition, embedding funding for external clinical supervision into all Human Services Contracts is essential to support staff and mitigate risks of staff burnout and vicarious trauma.

Recommendation 8

The NSW Government must increase funding for the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Development Strategy (2025-2035)* to build capacity for the regional and remote workforce to provide culturally responsive support to migrant and refugee women, culturally safe support to Aboriginal women and families, appropriate support to women and children with disability and LGBTQIA+ women.

The recently launched *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Development Strategy, 2025-2035* (the Strategy) places an emphasis on the sector's capacity to provide culturally-safe support for Aboriginal women and families. However, it lacks sufficient focus on culturally responsive support for migrant and refugee women, women with disability and LGBTQIA+ people.

While DVNSW receives project-based funding for sector capacity building (for the SHS workforce and the broader DFV workforce), the budgets and reach are constrained. Face-to-face training, identified by members as the preferred mode, is costly, particularly in regional and remote areas due to additional travel and accommodation costs. Additional funding is needed for training and development across the sector, as evidenced by the results of a workforce survey and session conducted at the Regional Forum. Members called for more in-person training opportunities, articulating the need for further training and development in culturally-responsive service delivery for migrant and refugee clients as a priority. Survey results showed that:

- 50% of services did not feel confident in providing culturally responsive support to migrant and refugee clients (33% had received somewhat adequate training and resources, but felt more would be useful, 17% felt confident in providing support).
- 47% of services had received somewhat adequate training and resources to provide culturally-safe support to Aboriginal clients but felt more would be useful (39% felt confident in providing culturally-safe support, 14% did not feel confident).
- 44% of services received somewhat adequate training and resources to provide appropriate support to clients with disability but felt more would be useful (29% did not feel confident in providing support to clients with disability and 27% felt confident).
- 36% of services received somewhat adequate training and resources to provide appropriate support to children and young people (24%

felt confident in providing support, 20% did not feel confident, and 20% did not provide services to children and young people).

Despite these areas for growth, many DVNSW members were able to highlight examples of regional and remote services who are leading the way in providing culturally-safe support to Aboriginal women and families. Members reported significant progress has been made over the last few years in increasing the Aboriginal workforce, particularly in regional and remote areas where there are larger Aboriginal populations. Some regional services report that up to 50% of their workforce are Aboriginal, reflecting local community demographics. Others are actively working towards this goal.

One inspiring initiative is the Yarning for Change Program by Women Up North in the Northern Rivers. This is a free program led by Aboriginal facilitators with expertise in trauma recovery and family well-being. Through yarning circles, this program strengthens culturally informed responses to violence and supports healing for Aboriginal women and builds resilience.

Despite progress in expanding the Aboriginal workforce in some regional and remote communities, continued investment is required to ensure priority cohorts have access to culturally responsive and appropriate support. Increased NSW Government funding for the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Workforce Development Strategy (2025–2035)* is essential to strengthen sector capacity to meet diverse community needs. This includes sustained, sector-wide training targeted at increasing confidence to support priority cohorts as identified at the Regional Forum: migrant and refugee communities (highest priority), Aboriginal families, people with disability, and children and young people.

DVNSW notes that any future SHS Workforce Development Strategy should take regard to this recommendation.

Improving access to the justice system

Recommendation 9

The NSW Government must upgrade regional and remote courthouses with safe rooms and audio-visual link (AVL) facilities and ensure all police stations are equipped with AVL technology, so that victim-survivors can safely and confidently give evidence without facing their perpetrators.

Victim-survivors in regional and remote NSW face additional barriers to accessing the justice system. DVNSW members spoke of the long distances that victim-survivors often must travel to attend domestic violence-related hearings, including Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) hearings at distant court locations. Without access to a car and with limited public transport available, attending court is not always possible.

Even when victim-survivors can attend court, some regional and remote courts don't have a safe room for victims to wait in before their matter is called. This places victim-survivors at significant risk, as they do not have protection from their perpetrator.

Further, members reported that victim-survivors are often excluded from their own court matters. In some cases, police have advised women not to attend court for ADVO mentions. This excludes victim-survivors from engaging in the court process, undermining their safety, wellbeing, and autonomy, and denying them the opportunity to share their experiences. It may also prevent victim-survivors from accessing information, support and referrals from the local Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS), who provide this support on ADVO mention days.

While the 2025-26 budget invested into audio visual link (AVL) upgrades in metropolitan Sydney, many regional and rural courts still lack this technology. Previously, the 2022-23 budget committed \$18 million to expand AVL facilities in approximately 50 courts and tribunals, however it is not clear whether these uplifts have reached the most disadvantaged and remote courts. AVL

facilities allow victim-survivors to safely provide evidence remotely, often from their local police station, so they can avoid facing their perpetrator in court. This helps to minimise re-traumatisation and any potential risks the perpetrator poses to the victim-survivor's safety.

While the 2025-26 budget invested into audio visual link (AVL) upgrades in metropolitan Sydney, many regional and rural courts still lack this technology. Previously, the 2022-23 budget committed \$18 million to expand AVL facilities in approximately 50 courts and tribunals, however these uplifts have not reached the most disadvantaged and remote courts. AVL facilities allow victim-survivors to safely provide evidence remotely, often from their local police station, so they can avoid facing their perpetrator in court. This helps to minimise re-traumatisation and any potential risks the perpetrator poses to the victim's safety.

All victim-survivors have the right to access a justice system that is safe, trauma-informed, and responsive – whether they live in a city, regional or remote community in NSW. All courts across NSW should be equipped with AVL facilities and safe rooms to improve safety and access for victim-survivors to the justice system.

Disaster management and recovery

Recommendation 10

The NSW Government must integrate domestic and family violence responses into all NSW Government disaster management plans, ensuring evacuation procedures prioritise the safety of victim survivors.

Recommendation 11

The NSW Government must provide sustained funding to specialised DFV services to ensure they can maintain service delivery and support during disaster management and recovery.

Natural disasters continue to disproportionately impact women and children, particularly in regional and remote communities. Women Up North (WUN), based in the Northern Rivers town of Lismore, shared their experience of the ongoing effects of the Lismore floods during the Regional Forum. They have seen firsthand how floods and other disasters disrupt lives and strain local support systems. Despite these challenges, the resilience and leadership of community networks have been the cornerstone of recovery.

The following quote from WUN highlights the resilience of the local community:

“When disaster strikes, it’s the strength of our community that carries us through. Every act of care, every shared resource, and every voice raised in support makes a difference. Together, we’re not just responding to crises—we’re building resilience for the future.”

When the 2022 Lismore floods struck, WUN worked tirelessly to keep essential services running – transitional housing, outreach, early intervention, and crisis support – even as infrastructure was damaged. The demand for DFV support grew, and community members stepped up to fill gaps, ensuring women and families could access safety and care.

WUN continues to champion community-driven safety planning, including transport and emergency accommodation before disasters occur. These efforts help prevent women and children from facing additional risks during evacuations. While fundraising remains a key tool for meeting urgent needs, the commitment of local networks shows the power of collective action.

DVNSW stresses the urgent need for proactive housing strategies in disaster-prone areas, such as those at high risk of floods and bushfires. During disaster and recovery, gender inequality contributes to increased DFV risk and must be explicitly addressed in disaster planning and response frameworks. A cohesive and collaborative government approach is essential, particularly in the context of DFV, to ensure safe, appropriate, and timely recovery responses. Forward planning must include dedicated, secure crisis accommodation for DFV victim-survivors to prevent them from being placed in shared spaces with perpetrators or unsafe environments.

Funding place-based primary prevention initiatives

Recommendation 12

Increase funding for place-based primary prevention initiatives in regional and remote communities.

DVNSW members voiced concerns about the lack of funding for local, place-based, community-led prevention initiatives in regional and remote NSW. They also highlighted the loss of funding for country-based services that previously delivered primary prevention programs but were not successful in securing funding through the recent Primary Prevention Multi-Year Partnerships Grants Program.

Members shared their experiences of thoughtfully engaging with institutions and challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours with care. They emphasised the importance of others taking similar action, noting that meaningful change occurs when communities are invited into the conversation, even when it's uncomfortable.

A quote from a member at the Regional Forum on the importance of engaging in prevention:

“Put yourself in situations that you’re uncomfortable in and call out the attitude. Everyone has a role to play”.

Effective violence prevention in regional and remote NSW requires strong leadership, coordinated implementation, and adequate resourcing of local, place-based initiatives. Local initiatives and marginalised community groups must be supported across NSW to tailor prevention initiatives to their own communities. This includes programs designed and delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, people with disability, and the LGBTIQ+ community.

Engaging with perpetrators

Recommendation 13

Increase funding for Men's Behaviour Change Programs to expand access across regional and remote communities.

A key theme emerging from the Regional Forum was the critical need to engage with perpetrators to effectively address DFV across regional and remote communities. Many regional and remote communities currently lack funding for Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs), despite these programs being vital for challenging attitudes, changing behaviours, and ensuring perpetrators are held accountable.

To meaningfully reduce the higher rates of violence in regional and remote communities, responsibility must shift away from victim-survivors, for example the societal expectation that women should prioritise leaving a violent relationship, and onto those who choose to use violence. Expanding access to MBCPs across regional and remote NSW is a crucial step toward providing support for men who use violence and creating safer communities for all.



CONCLUSION

The 2025 DVNSW Regional Forum illuminated both the urgency and the opportunity to end DFV in regional and remote NSW. Across every discussion, members reinforced that while violence is preventable, the systems designed to respond remain under-resourced and inequitable. Communities outside metropolitan centres continue to face the greatest barriers to safety – from chronic housing shortages and workforce shortages to vast distances, limited transport, and inadequate justice infrastructure.

Yet the solutions are clear and achievable. Regional and remote services have the knowledge, partnerships, and lived experience to drive effective, locally led responses. What they need is sustainable investment and structural reform. Increasing core funding, embedding regional loadings, expanding housing and transitional accommodation options, strengthening the workforce, and resourcing culturally safe, place-based prevention and perpetrator programs are critical steps toward a coordinated statewide response that leaves no one behind.

DVNSW calls on the NSW Government to act with urgency to fund regional and remote communities to end DFV across the state. With sustained commitment, collaboration, and investment, every person in NSW, regardless of where they live, can have access to safety, support, justice, housing, and a future free from violence.

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GLOSSARY

Domestic and Family Violence (DFV)

An umbrella term that captures the definitions of both *domestic violence* and *family violence*.

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.

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. 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.



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