

Inquiry into the government service delivery standards in regional NSW

DVNSW Submission
February 2026

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.

DVNSW 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.



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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A note on 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.

DVNSW 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.

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Introduction

Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the *Inquiry into Government Service Delivery Standards in Regional New South Wales*. DVNSW has identified significant disparities in government investment between regional and metropolitan areas across NSW, particularly in relation to specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services.

DVNSW's *Ending violence in regional and remote NSW* ([DVNSW RegionalFocusReportemail.pdf](#)) demonstrates that current service delivery standards in regional NSW are being undermined by structural underinvestment, rising demand, and systemic barriers that render “equal” funding settings inequitable in practice. Regional and remote areas experience materially higher DFV rates. For example, New England and North-West NSW record DFV rates at 705.2 per 100,000, more than six times the rate in the highest metropolitan region (North Sydney and Hornsby). Compounding barriers such as transport limitations, digital isolation, and inadequate justice infrastructure place victim-survivors at further risk of harm.

These conditions affect not only whether people can access services, but whether services can safely and consistently meet community need. Providers across regional NSW report rising referrals in services already operating well beyond funded capacity, creating unsafe service strain and significant workforce burnout risks that are not adequately captured in current performance reporting frameworks (Domestic Violence NSW, 2025, *Regional Focus Report*).

This submission draws heavily on the experiences of DVNSW members in regional NSW, including outcomes from the [DVNSW Regional Forum held in Armidale, NSW](#).

Recommendations

1. Ensure performance measurement and accountability mechanisms capture information on actual levels of need, with funding adjusted accordingly. For specialist DFV services, this would include an immediate increase to core funding by 50% and additional supplementary payments to regional and remote services.

Core funding must reflect actual demand, the higher costs of regional delivery, and the compounding impacts of remoteness. Without this baseline investment, performance frameworks and outsourced accountability will continue to incentivise throughput while services remain structurally unable to meet need safely.

2. Adopt commissioning models for outsourced services that strengthen community-led organisations, and support place-based models that understand and respond to local needs to ensure victim-survivor and worker safety.

Commissioning should prioritise community-led and place-based models, reduce disruption and fragmentation caused by competitive tendering, and require workforce supports, such as funded clinical supervision, as standard contract conditions for services that are trauma-exposed and safety-critical.

3. Close metro–regional justice infrastructure gaps.

Upgrade regional and remote courts and police stations to ensure universal access to safe rooms and AVL capability, so victim-survivors can participate safely and consistently regardless of location.

4. Modernise performance measurement to include service strain and safety indicators.

Reporting should capture real pressures on services, such as demand compared with funded capacity, wait times, travel required for outreach, workforce vacancies and turnover, and access to supervision and wellbeing supports. Outcome measures should be focused on sustained safety, not just short-term activity.

5. Fully fund the implementation of the domestic and family violence Quality Standards (QS).

To ensure accountable, high quality service delivery across the specialist domestic and family violence workforce, so victim-survivors consistently receive safe, trauma informed support that is based on quality practice and promotes long-term healing and recovery.

6. Commit funding to effectively implement the NSW Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety Framework (CARAS).

To ensure that victim-survivors have greater access to safety and support through the use of consistent, coordinated, and effective responses to domestic and family violence across the state and that responders have clearly defined roles and access to training and capacity building.

7. Embed DFV capability in disaster planning and recovery.

Ensure DFV is integrated into disaster management planning, with dedicated crisis accommodation and sustained funding so that specialist DFV services can maintain delivery during and after disasters.

8. Strengthen prevention and perpetrator interventions in regional NSW.

Expand place-based prevention initiatives and access to Men's Behaviour Change Programs, recognising that a regional service system without perpetrator interventions remains locked in crisis response and cannot reduce demand sustainably.

Discussion

(a) Current performance measurement and accountability mechanisms, including relevant monitoring metrics and reporting frameworks

Recommendation 1. Ensure performance measurement and accountability mechanism capture information on actual levels of need, with funding adjusted accordingly. For specialist DFV services, this would include an immediate increase to core funding by 50% and additional supplementary payments to regional and remote services.

DVNSW's regional members report that current performance measures do not reflect what is really happening on the ground in regional and remote NSW.

Many regional domestic and family violence services are meeting, and often exceeding, their contracted Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). However, this does not mean demand is being met, that services are coping, or that they are adequately resourced. Instead, services continue to report growing wait lists, staff shortages, rising operational costs, and significant unmet need, even while their KPI performance appears strong. This highlights a core problem: current performance measures focus on activity and outputs, rather than safety, equity, or whether services have the capacity to respond when people need help.

DVNSW would also like to emphasise the combined impact of disadvantage and remoteness on both service demand and delivery costs. The need for regional loadings increases with remoteness, reflecting the higher cost of running services and the more complex needs facing communities. When accountability frameworks do not properly account for these factors, they risk normalising inequity and misrepresenting funding shortfalls as performance failures by services, rather than as structural system problems. For example, the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS) in regional NSW cover several local courts to provide court support to victim-survivors at Mention and Hearing in domestic violence related matters. The workers are often working in isolation, travelling several hundreds of kilometres with little to no mobile access. Workers require overnight accommodation and additional supervision which is not accounted for in the current funding models. Over the past two financial years, the number of referrals to the WDVCASs statewide has increased by 15.4% but core funding has not increased for over a decade (Legal Aid, 2025).

Providing domestic and family violence services in regional and remote NSW costs significantly more than in metropolitan areas due to:

- Much higher rates of violence. Recorded domestic violence-related assault rates are around 70 per cent higher in regional NSW than in Greater Sydney and are increasing faster over time. In remote areas, rates are up to 3.5 times the NSW average and around six times higher than in major cities, based on NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data (2025).
- Workforce pressures. Services struggle to attract and retain staff due to lower wages, limited housing, and competition from government agencies and other industries.
- Higher travel costs. Long distances mean higher fuel costs and more staff time spent travelling, reducing time available for frontline service delivery.
- Greater brokerage costs. Services often need to cover transport, accommodation, and other expenses so clients can access specialist services located hours away.

(Domestic Violence NSW, 2025a)

Despite these pressures, current reporting frameworks do not consistently measure unmet demand, the number of people turned away, or the safety risks created by delays in support. As a result, performance reporting can present an overly positive picture while masking growing gaps in access to safety for women and children in regional and remote NSW (Impact Economics and Policy, 2024).

(b) Performance measurement and accountability mechanisms for the delivery of government services that are outsourced to third-party providers

Recommendation 2. Adopt commissioning models for outsourced services that strengthen community-led organisations, and support place-based models that understand and respond to local needs to ensure victim-survivor and worker safety.

Most specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services in NSW are delivered by non-government organisations under government contracts. This means that the way services are commissioned, funded, and managed directly influences the quality, safety, and accessibility of support available to victim-survivors.

DVNSW's regional report identifies clear risks in current outsourcing and contracting models. Competitive tendering processes and contracts awarded to non-local providers can weaken existing local service networks, reduce community trust, and limit how quickly services can respond to local needs. In regional and remote areas, where services are already thinly spread, these issues can further reduce access to timely, culturally safe, and place-based support for victim-survivors.

DVNSW members also report that many contracts do not adequately account for workforce sustainability in safety-critical services. Frontline DFV work involves significant and sustained exposure to trauma, yet contract settings often fail to fund essential supports such as clinical supervision, training, and workload management. Without these supports, staff burnout and turnover increase, further reducing service capacity (Batterham et al., 2026).

Where funding does not flex to reflect rising demand, workforce shortages, or higher regional costs, accountability mechanisms can become punitive rather than protective. Services may be forced to prioritise meeting contractual targets over responding to risk, quality, and safety. In these circumstances, "delivering to contract" can mean delivering less safely, not more effectively.

Of note, the domestic and family violence (DFV) sector has not received an increase to core funding for more than a decade, despite significant rises in operational and staffing costs. For the last five years, DVNSW has advocated to the NSW Government for at least a 50 per cent increase to core funding for the specialist DFV sector across the state. Adequate increases to core funding are essential to ensure victim-survivors receive the wrap around, trauma and domestic violence-informed care they deserve, including access to safe housing, justice, health services, and culturally safe, holistic support for wellbeing and recovery.

DVNSW therefore concludes that accountability frameworks for outsourced services must better reflect the realities of regional and remote service delivery. Without contracts that are adequately funded, locally informed, and flexible to demand, performance reporting risks masking system failure while placing unreasonable and unsafe pressure on frontline services.

(c) Differences in government service delivery standards between metropolitan and regional areas

Recommendation 3. Close metro–regional justice infrastructure gaps.

DVNSW’s regional report finds there is effectively a two-tier standard of government service delivery between metropolitan and regional NSW. Although domestic and family violence is more prevalent in regional areas, victim-survivors in these areas often have access to fewer services, reduced specialist coverage, and lower-quality safety supports than those in metropolitan Sydney.

This disparity is particularly evident in justice system infrastructure, where essential safety measures vary significantly depending on location. Regional DVNSW members report reduced access to fundamental protections in country areas such as safe rooms and audio-visual link (AVL) technology in courts and police stations. These features are critical for preventing direct contact between victim-survivors and perpetrators and for enabling safe participation in legal processes.

DVNSW notes that metropolitan Sydney has benefited from upgrades to AVL capacity, such as the significant increase of AVL facilities of 22 courtrooms at the Downing Centre in Sydney. By contrast, many regional and rural courts continue to operate without reliable AVL technology or dedicated safe waiting areas. In some locations, victim-survivors are required to attend court in person without adequate separation from perpetrators, increasing risk, fear, and trauma.

These gaps have serious consequences. Inadequate safety infrastructure can deter victim-survivors from engaging with the justice system, compromise personal safety and exacerbate trauma. They also undermine the principle that people across NSW should have equal access to the same standard of protection, justice, and safety, regardless of where they live.

Government commitment is required to ensure adequate infrastructure is available to enable victim-survivors in regional areas to safely access specialist service provision. DVNSW also strongly supports adequate and ongoing funding and the expansion of the joint Co-Location Pilot between NSW Police Force and the Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS). The Co-Location pilot is currently funded in 10 locations across NSW where a WDVCAS worker is located at a Police Area Command (PAC) or Police District (PD) to assist women attending the police station for domestic and family violence related matters. DVNSW contests that this service provides an opportunity for women to receive immediate, individualised supports and is a conduit between the sector and the NSW Police Force.

Additionally, DVNSW recommends a one-off supplementary payment in addition to a 50% increase to core funding for all regional, rural and/or remote specialist DFV services. This is essential to address the disproportionate rates of DFV in these communities and to ensure services can deliver equitable, culturally responsive and safe models of support.

Without consistent and considered investment in regional justice infrastructure, and without funding arrangements that account for actual levels of need and the real cost of service delivery in regional areas, government service delivery standards will continue to fall short of being equitable or genuinely statewide.

(d) Options to improve monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the delivery of government and publicly-funded services, with reference to the social justice and community sector and regional NSW

Recommendation 4. Modernise performance measurement to include service strain and safety indicators.

DVNSW recommends adopting an approach to monitoring that goes beyond measuring outputs and activity levels. Program monitoring frameworks should include service strain, demand pressures, and the conditions required for safe and effective service delivery, including workforce capacity, cultural safety, infrastructure, and funding adequacy.

This approach would ensure performance is understood within its operating context, and would support continuous improvement, while maintaining clear service accountability. It recognises the impact of high demand and structural under-resourcing, and would ensure services are not penalised for factors beyond their control, but that they are still responsible for delivering safe, quality, and equitable outcomes for victim-survivors of DFV.

In regional and remote NSW, monitoring and evaluation of funded services should capture the pressure services are under, not just what they deliver. This includes practical measures such as:

- Demand compared to service capacity
- Wait times for support
- Travel time and distance required for outreach
- Workforce vacancy rates and staff turnover
- Access to clinical supervision and wellbeing supports for frontline workers

(Domestic Violence NSW, 2025b).

These measures would give a clearer picture of service strain, workforce sustainability, and safety risks that are not visible in current reporting frameworks.

DVNSW regional members stress that evaluation should look beyond individual service performance and assess whether government commissioning strengthens local, place-based service systems. This includes examining how well services are supported to collaborate with each other and whether funding models enable culturally responsive and accessible support, particularly for Aboriginal communities, migrant and refugee clients, and people with disability.

DVNSW further recommends that monitoring frameworks include the broader systemic factors that determine whether DFV services can support long-term safety, not just crisis responses. This includes access to safe and affordable housing pathways and the availability of safe justice infrastructure, such as secure court facilities and audio-visual links.

Without monitoring and evaluation frameworks that reflect these realities, reporting will continue to underestimate risk, mask unmet demand, and limit government's ability to make informed decisions about where investment is most urgently needed in regional NSW.

e) The need to develop or reform legislative frameworks to deliver, monitor and review government service delivery standards

Recommendation 5. Fully fund the implementation of the domestic and family violence Quality Standards (QS).

Recommendation 6. Commit funding to effectively implement the NSW Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety Framework (CARAS).

DVNSW supports strengthening legislative and regulatory frameworks, so government service delivery standards better reflect what specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) work actually involves.

DVNSW was funded to develop the Quality Standards project, established to define minimum standards for specialist DFV services in NSW. Its purpose is to clearly set out what specialist DFV practice looks like and to ensure government frameworks recognise the complexity, expertise and accountability required in this sector.

Importantly, the Standards move beyond a narrow compliance or “tick-box” approach. They are designed to strengthen specialist practice, support workforce recognition, promote collaboration across the sector, and enable continuous quality improvement rather than punitive auditing.

The Standards have been developed in close collaboration with metropolitan, regional and remote specialist services to ensure they reflect diverse service contexts and the lived realities of victim-survivors across NSW. We expect that the Standards, along with a recommended approach to implementation, will be finalised by June 2026.

Embedding the Quality Standards into legislative and regulatory frameworks would:

- create clearer and more consistent expectations for specialist DFV services
- support transparent, evidence-based monitoring of publicly funded services
- clarify what constitutes specialist expertise
- protect public investment
- strengthen accountability across the sector.

The Standards are underpinned by principles that prioritise the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors and workers; recognise coercive control and system misuse; centre children and young people as victim-survivors; promote access and equity; embed culturally safe and anti-colonial practice; and support accountability and continuous improvement.

In addition, the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Common Risk Assessment and Safety (CARAS) framework is currently under review and represents a significant reform opportunity. The aim of CARAS is to improve how domestic and family violence is identified and responded to across government, non-government and community organisations, by strengthening early identification, improving consistency, refining information sharing and increasing system capacity (Domestic Violence NSW, 2025a).

DVNSW supports the intent of the Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety (CARAS) to create more consistent and effective responses across NSW. DVNSW welcomes the framework’s focus on keeping the person using violence in view and avoiding victim-blaming approaches that can further harm those seeking help.

Together, legislative recognition of the Quality Standards and effective implementation of CARAS would provide a stronger, more consistent foundation for delivering, monitoring and reviewing DFV service delivery standards across NSW, including in regional and remote communities. However, success of these important frameworks hinge on appropriate government investment, including support for implementation, evaluation and education.

(f) Other related matters

Recommendation 7. Embed DFV capability in disaster planning and recovery.

Recommendation 8. Strengthen prevention and perpetrator interventions in regional NSW.

There are several additional pressures that significantly affect domestic and family violence service delivery standards in regional and remote NSW. Disasters, housing shortages and limited perpetrator intervention programs are driving repeat demand and undermining long-term safety.

Research shows a clear link between disasters including floods, bushfires, drought and extreme weather, and increased risk of domestic and family violence (Parkinson, 2015). These events place added stress on households, disrupt services and housing, and increase isolation. DVNSW calls for DFV to be explicitly embedded into disaster planning, response and recovery, including the provision of dedicated crisis accommodation. Without this, victim-survivors are at risk of being placed in unsafe or inappropriate housing or remaining in violent situations.

Housing scarcity is another major factor affecting service delivery standards. In many regional areas there are few, if any, safe and affordable housing options available. This limits the ability of services to support victim-survivors to move beyond crisis and into stable recovery. As a result, services are forced to manage repeated crisis presentations, placing ongoing pressure on already overstretched systems.

DVNSW regional members also note lack of perpetrator interventions in regional and remote communities as a critical gap. Many areas have little or no access to Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs), which are essential for holding people who use violence accountable and reducing repeat harm. Without these programs, responsibility remains with victim-survivors to manage risk, and services are left responding to the same crises again and again.

These issues are not separate from service delivery standards. Disasters, housing shortages and the absence of perpetrator programs all directly shape whether regional DFV services can reduce harm, support recovery and deliver consistent, safe outcomes for women and children.

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