Domestic Violence NSW

THE FOUNDATIONS OF SAFETY

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NSW –
2027-28 NSW PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

Domestic Violence 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, present and emerging.

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.



About us

Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) is the independent 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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Executive summary

Strong foundations keep women and children safe. When women leave domestic and family violence, they need immediate access to safe accommodation and specialist support. Women's refuges and the specialist domestic and family violence workforce provide that foundation. Investment in both is essential to ensure women and children can escape violence safely and rebuild their lives.

Women and children in NSW continue to experience domestic and family violence at alarming rates. On average, every month 2,450 assaults are reported to NSW Police, 80 women and children admitted to hospital with serious injuries, and two deaths from domestic and family violence homicides. These figures capture only part of the harm. An estimated 82% of women who experience domestic and family violence never contact police; while some forms of abuse such as coercive control escalate without physical indicators of harm.

Domestic and family violence remains the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. In 2024–25, more than 12,000 women sought assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) due to domestic and family violence. Women and children face the greatest danger when they try to leave and in the months after separation. Timely access to crisis accommodation and specialist support at this point can prevent further harm and loss of life.

To strengthen these foundations and improve safety outcomes for women and children, DVNSW calls on the NSW Government to invest in two connected priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Commit to a 50% increase ($61.34 million) in core operational funding for women's refuges in 2027-28.

Refuges are the foundation of the domestic violence crisis response – they provide safe accommodation alongside specialist risk assessment, safety planning and case management. They also support women living in the community, helping to prevent homelessness and maintain safety beyond a refuge stay.

Despite being a critical part of both the domestic and family violence and homelessness responses, women's refuges were excluded from the Government's 2026-27 commitment of $184.1 million to frontline domestic and family violence programs.

DVNSW's October 2026 survey of 31 member organisations, representing a third of SHS-funded organisations operating refuges, demonstrated the extent of the pressure facing refuges, with services reporting:

- Supporting an average of 50% more clients than they are funded to assist
- Turning away 66% of women and children seeking help
- Managing staff workloads 35% above funded levels.

These pressures compromise the capacity of women's refuges to provide timely, intensive support to women and children escaping domestic violence.

Excessive workloads increase the risk that indicators of escalating harm are missed at the very time women and children face the greatest danger. High workforce shortages also contribute to burnout and staff turnover, resulting in the loss of specialist expertise that is critical to effective risk assessment, planning and homicide prevention.

Strengthening other frontline domestic and family violence programs is also expected to increase referrals to women's refuges that are already operating beyond capacity.

Extending the 50% increase in core operational funding to women's refuges would strengthen the Government's response to both domestic and family violence and homelessness. The additional $61.34 million investment would bring funding closer to the actual level of service refuges are already providing and the level of demand they are responding to every day. It would enable women's refuges to increase the number of specialist frontline staff, bring caseloads back to more manageable levels, and ensure that the sector has a stable workforce with capacity to provide earlier intervention and accessible, culturally responsive support.

This investment would ensure that more women and children can leave domestic and family violence safely, with sustained specialist support to recover from trauma and rebuild their lives. Improved capacity for earlier intervention will also help to reduce the risk of extended homelessness and repeat crises while reducing pressure on the NSW health and justice systems.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Fund Phase 1 of the Quality Practice Standards implementation across the specialist domestic and family violence workforce ($3.99 million).

A skilled specialist workforce is essential to delivering consistent, high-quality responses to victim-survivors across NSW.

Every victim-survivor needs a skilled and consistent response to keep them safe, wherever they reach out to specialist domestic and family violence support in NSW. The Quality Practice Standards (the Standards) provide a foundation and shared framework for achieving this across the entire sector.

The Standards represent a significant, sector-led investment in the foundations of a stronger specialist response to domestic and family violence. Developed over three years by the specialist domestic and family violence sector, the Standards reflect extensive sector consultation involving 88 services and 499 participants. As such, they're grounded in practice, and responsive to the diverse needs of victim-survivors across NSW.

However, their impact depends on services having the resources and organisational support to put them into practice. Feedback from members throughout the development of the Standards and subsequent consultations has consistently reinforced their preference for implementation to remain sector-led and coordinated by DVNSW as the Peak Body.

Our proposed investment of $3.99 million over three years would fund DVNSW to commence Phase 1 of the implementation of the Standards across the entire NSW domestic and family violence sector. It will provide the foundation for a practical, accessible and evolving framework that supports consistent implementation, enables evaluation and embeds continuous improvement across the specialist domestic and family violence sector.

Together, these investments would strengthen the capacity, quality and sustainability of NSW's specialist domestic and family violence response. They would increase access to safe accommodation and specialist support, support implementation of consistent practice standards and help deliver safer, more sustainable outcomes for women and children across NSW.

Women's refuges – the foundations of the DFV crisis response

RECOMMENDATION 1: Commit to a 50% increase ($61.34 million) in core operational funding for women's refuges in 2027-28.

The role of women's refuges

Women's refuges, funded through the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) program, play a vital and foundational role in the NSW Government's response to both homelessness, and domestic and family violence.

The 89 funded Women's refuges across NSW provide short to medium term crisis accommodation, specialist case management, and wrap-around support for women and children who are escaping domestic and family violence and are subsequently homeless, or at risk of homelessness.

Women's refuges are widely recognised in the community as services that provide safe, crisis accommodation for women and children made homeless by domestic and family violence. However, their work extends well beyond providing a bed.

Specialist domestic violence case workers in refuges help prevent further victimisation and harm to women and children and address the circumstances associated with domestic and family violence related homicide[1].

Case workers assist women to identify risk and escalating danger, organise protection and safety planning throughout the process of escaping domestic violence, provide secure accommodation, and help to coordinate responses across agencies – supporting victim-survivors to recover from the physical, mental, developmental, cultural and financial impacts of violence on their lives.

The complexity of need

> "*Leaving an abusive relationship does not mean the challenges are over*"
> – Women's refuge staff member

In addition to the high risk of homelessness, many women and children who leave domestic and family violence experience complex challenges and support needs including:

- Safety – ongoing threats, abuse and violence through stalking, coercive control and abuse through parenting arrangements or legal processes. The period following separation is also considered the most dangerous time for victim-survivors, with the risk of escalating violence and DFV-homicide at its highest.
- Physical health – treatment for injuries, chronic pain, disability and sexual or reproductive health issues caused by domestic violence.
- Mental health – therapy and treatment for psychological injuries, including complex trauma and post-traumatic stress that affects daily functioning and recovery of victim-survivors, including children.
- Financial and economic – perpetrators often restrict women's access to money and incur debts, while violence and separation disrupts women's employment, limiting their ability to re-establish their lives and regain their independence.

- Legal and administrative – many women need to navigate the justice system to obtain ADVO's, make parenting arrangements, and settle property and family law matters while managing their own safety and trauma.
- Developmental – domestic and family violence impacts children's social, emotional and educational development, with children often needing specialist, age-appropriate therapeutic support and assistance to recover and maintain their participation in school.
- Cultural connection – Victim-survivors are often removed from their homes, which includes connection to Country, kin, community, and results in a legacy of trauma. Many women and children require culturally safe and responsive support to maintain or rebuild safe connections to culture, language, family, community and Country, including culturally responsive support for Aboriginal women and children, and migrant and refugee women and children, to strengthen belonging, identity and recovery.

The need for specialist domestic violence case workers

Addressing the complex and interconnected issues facing women and children who have experienced domestic violence requires both a crisis response and intensive, specialist case management and support – often for an extended period.

- 50% of women accessing NSW Specialist Homelessness Services as a result of domestic and family violence require specialist case management support for 3 to 12 months[2]

Specialist domestic violence case workers have an in-depth understanding of how violence, coercive control and trauma impact on women's and children's circumstances. This informs their approach to assessment, case planning, and support.

In women's refuges, this specialist expertise is essential to providing:

- Individual safety planning that assesses perpetrator behaviour, patterns of escalation, and the risk of ongoing abuse in different contexts.
- Trauma-informed case management and wrap-around support that recognises how fear, isolation, surveillance, financial dependence and ongoing abuse continue to impact women and children.
- Culturally safe and responsive support that respects women's and children's identities, choices and connections to community, including working alongside Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) and specialist migrant and refugee services.

Delivering this specialist support requires time to build trust and engagement with women and children, the ability to respond flexibly to changing risks and circumstances, access to interpreters and culturally responsive resources, and strong partnerships with community-led and specialist services. It also requires a skilled and supported workforce with expertise in domestic and family violence, trauma, risk assessment, safety planning and recovery-oriented practice.

Research shows that this specialist domestic and family violence informed case management and wrap-around support is effective.

The Australian Government's *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches* (2024)[3] noted that:

> Caseworkers, crisis line counsellors and specialist refuge workers act under enormous pressure, and during times of heightened crisis, to prevent homicide and (domestic, family and sexual violence)-related suicide. These services are experts at managing safety and risk and work to extract victim- survivors from life-threatening situations, often calling in assistance from disparate systems ... **For many victim-survivors, this assistance is literally the difference between life and death** – p70

A 2026 Australian study[4] of 823 women over five years found that victim-survivors of domestic and family violence who received specialist wrap around supports had both fewer service re-entries and fewer and shorter periods of engagement before exit than women accessing crisis accommodation alone.

The growing need for women's refuge services

Domestic and family violence continues to threaten the lives of women and children across NSW. It is also the single largest driver of homelessness, forcing women and children to leave unsafe homes while undermining the financial independence needed to secure alternative accommodation.

The ongoing housing crisis and high cost of living are compounding these harms, leaving many in crisis, facing prolonged homelessness and increasing pressure on women's refuges to provide protection and sustained support.

Women and children continue to experience domestic and family violence at alarming rates

Rates of reported violence against women and children have been rising, with increases in reported assaults, murders, coercive control, stalking, intimidation, technology-facilitated abuse and other forms of domestic and family violence [5].

Every month across NSW, domestic and family violence results in an average:

- 2,450 assaults against women and children reported to NSW Police.
- 2,900 Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs) initiated by NSW Police where women are named as the Person in Need of Protection (PINOP).[6]
- 80 women and children being admitted to hospital with serious injuries.[7]
- 2 women and children dying from homicides[8].

Despite these staggering rates of victimisation, data suggests that 82% of women who experience domestic and family violence never contact police.[9]

> "*Technology-based abuse is growing and many perpetrators are tracking their children or ex-partners… They will often turn up at a women's refuge … and it makes everyone feel unsafe*" – Women's refuge staff member

We know that women and children are most at risk of increased violence and homicide when they are attempting to leave, and during the months after separation[10]. It is crucial that women have access to specialist support during this period to enhance safety and reduce the risk of escalating violence, serious harm or homicide.

Domestic and family violence is the largest single driver of homelessness

Domestic and family violence makes a home unsafe for women and children, while also depriving many women of financial resources and the capacity to work, undermining their ability to secure another home.

Escaping violence often means leaving the home immediately before any alternative accommodation is planned. This results in thousands of women and children being placed in short-term, temporary and crisis accommodation – many in women's refuges.

- One-quarter of people seeking support from a Specialist Homelessness Service do so as a direct result of domestic and family violence – 75% are women.[11]

In 2024-25, more than 12,000 women at risk of homelessness as a direct result of domestic and family violence sought support from a Specialist Homelessness Service in NSW.

Domestic violence affects women in all parts of the community and across the socio-economic spectrum. For many, escaping violence means leaving behind a home, assets, a career, support and cultural networks – with homelessness or dangerous and precarious living arrangements too often, the result.

- 69% of women who move away from home when their relationship ends due to domestic violence, are forced to leave property or assets behind. [12]

> "*We support women and children from all walks of life. Many have had careers, owned homes, been financially stable, and appeared to have supportive networks, yet still found themselves needing safety and support due to domestic and family violence*"
>
> – Women's refuge staff member

The housing crisis and high cost of living prevent women and children exiting

The NSW Government's Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035 explicitly acknowledges that securing affordable housing is now the biggest single issue facing people in NSW.

High rents and low rental vacancies across the state make private rentals unattainable for many women, particularly those with dependent children.

Demand for social housing also far exceeds supply. Priority applicants, including women and children escaping domestic violence and in urgent need, have increased by more than 100% over the last five years.

> "*Exit pathways for our clients are limited with the housing crisis and this means that our crisis clients are staying well past a year in accommodation*"
>
> – Women's refuge staff member

Homelessness is rising – increasing both demand for Specialist Homelessness Services and the length of time that people require support. Women's refuges are seeing more women and children staying longer in crisis accommodation with no alternative housing options or exit pathways available.

This trend is clearly visible in the data. Over the last decade, the total number of women accommodated in NSW Specialist Homelessness Services has almost doubled. Over the same period, the proportion of those women staying in accommodation for more than 13 weeks has increased from 33% to 44% (see Fig 1).

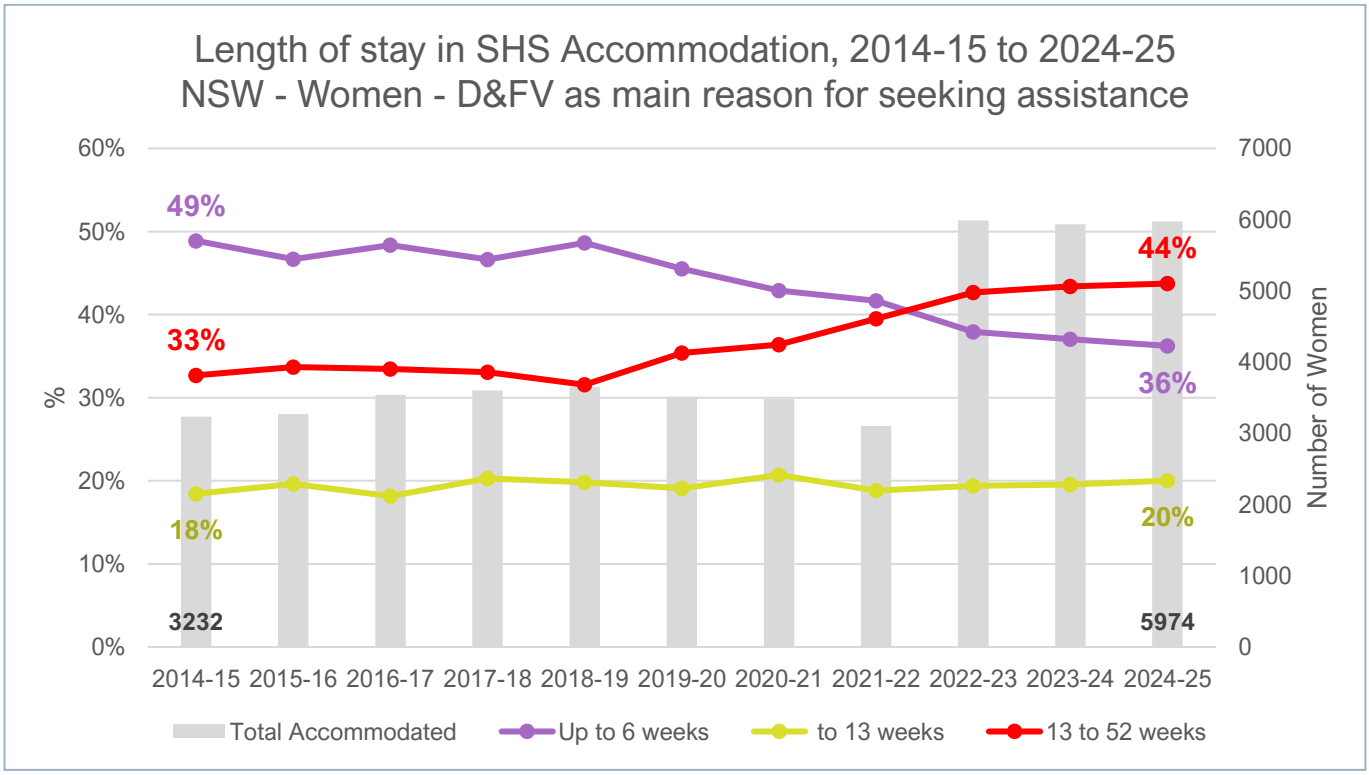


Fig 1 – Length of Stay in SHS Accommodation 2014-15 to 2024-25; Women in NSW with D&FV as main reason for seeking assistance (Source: AIHW, SHS Collection Data Cubes)

This limits service capacity to provide accommodation for new clients and increases the number of women turned away.

Worryingly, a growing number of women and children are exiting women's refuges into homelessness or precarious living situations or returning to domestic violence.

- The last three years have seen a 9% increase in women and children affected by domestic and family violence experiencing persistent homelessness[13].

Refuges outside government funding arrangements

Women's refuges operating with little or no recurrent government funding, including DVNSW members, are not consistently captured in government data, system mapping or service/program planning. These refuges draw on philanthropy, donations, support from faith-based organisations and private partnerships, and deliver specialist accommodation and support to women and children experiencing violence, often providing services comparable to those funded through the SHS program. They often provide specialist, grassroots responses for marginalised communities, including women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Despite playing an important role in the broader refuge system, their contribution is largely invisible in government data and planning processes.

We do not have a comprehensive picture of how many of these services operate across NSW, the number of women and children they support, or the requests they cannot meet. Their operational capacity, financial sustainability and workforce needs are also poorly understood. As a result, government may not have a complete understanding of refuge demand, service capacity, unmet need or the infrastructure required to support women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

One metropolitan DVNSW member, whose refuge accommodation and associated casework are funded through philanthropy, reported declining 176 referrals for refuge accommodation in FY 2025-26. During the same year, it accommodated 17 women and 13 children. The service advises that government does

not collect the refuge's client, referral or turn-away data, including information about clients' visa status. It receives referrals from across Sydney, rural and regional NSW and interstate, demonstrating that service demand routinely extends beyond local government and funding boundaries. This suggests that significant demand for refuge accommodation may exist outside datasets currently used to inform service planning and investment decisions.

Without this information, demand and unmet need are likely underestimated. While current evidence demonstrates a clear need for increased investment in women's refuges, the exclusion of refuges operating with little or no recurrent government funding means that existing estimates of demand and service gaps are likely conservative. Implementation of DCJ's *Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Data Strategy* should explicitly include refuges operating with little or no recurrent government funding. The NSW Government should map these refuges and resource voluntary, consistent and de-identified data collection covering service use, unmet requests, client demographics, operational capacity, funding sustainability and workforce needs. Data should distinguish referral volumes from the number of individual women and children seeking support.

Including these refuges would provide a more complete picture of demand and service capacity across NSW, enable more accurate forecasting of future investment requirements. and support better service planning, funding decisions and workforce capability development. Importantly, improved visibility would help government understand the full extent of refuge demand beyond that already demonstrated through funded services and existing data collections.

The urgent need for additional investment

DVNSW acknowledges the Government's 2026-27 commitment of $184.1 million over 4 years to deliver a 50% core funding increase across six frontline domestic and family violence programs. This investment recognised the acute financial pressures facing frontline services.

Unfortunately, women's refuges missed out on the uplift to core funding. As part of the Specialist Homelessness Services sector they were excluded from this additional investment, despite their critical role in supporting women and children and addressing domestic and family violence related homicide risks[14].

Further, while the 2026 recommissioning of Specialist Homelessness Services provided greater certainty for women's refuges with five-year contracts, the process did not include any increase in core operational funding for these services beyond annual indexation. Specialist Homelessness Services funding has only nominally increased over the last decade with average indexation of 3.34%.

Over the same period, these services have faced:

- A 50% increase in Award wages.
- A 41% increase in average costs due to inflation.
- A 70% increase in the number of women who contacted an SHS service seeking support due to domestic and family violence.
- An average 90% increase in the number of women who contacted an SHS service needing accommodation due to domestic and family violence (see Fig 2).

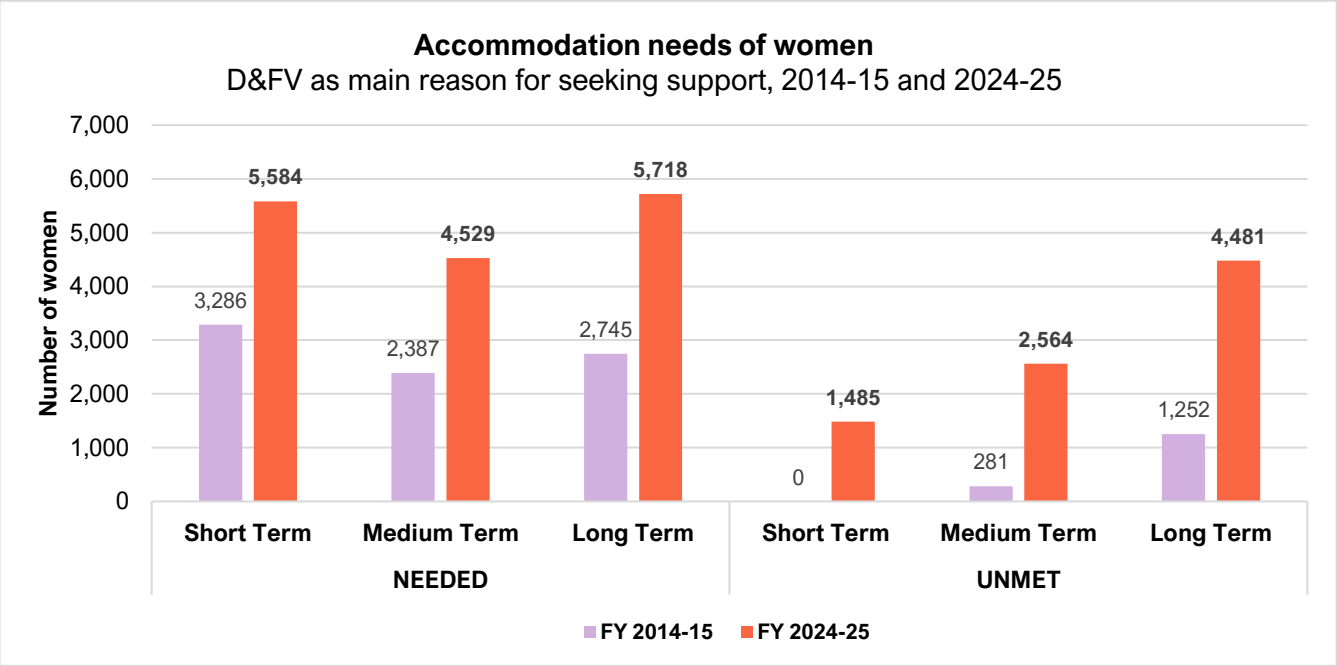


Fig 2 – Accommodation Needs of Women with D&FV as Main Reason for Seeking Support 2014-15 and 2024-25 (Source: AIHW, SHS Collection Data Cubes)

> "*We have over 100 women with or without children on the waitlist for our refuge accommodation at any one time*" – Women's refuge staff member

Women's refuges are at crisis point

Women's refuges have not had a real increase to their core operational funding since 2014-15

Despite a 70% increase in women seeking assistance, core funding for women's refuges still reflects the level of demand from over a decade ago.

To keep their doors open, services are being forced to make deep cuts in specialist staffing and operating costs, and focus predominantly on crisis services, rather than earlier intervention and support.

To better understand the funding and demand pressures facing Women's Refuges, Domestic Violence NSW conducted a survey of its members in October 2026. A total of 31 organisations responded, representing over one-third of the government SHS-refuge funded sector. Respondents included organisations across regional NSW and the Greater Sydney area.

Responses revealed a sector under enormous pressure, facing unprecedented demand, increasingly complex needs and a workforce operating far beyond its funded capacity.

Women's refuge member survey – key findings	2025-26
Average clients serviced above funded level	50%
Average proportion of clients turned away	66%
Average clients per FTE	Funded - 41.5 per FTE Actual - 56.8 per FTE

	35% above funding
Average staff turnover	26.6%

Refuges assisted an average of 50% more women and children than they were contractually funded to support. This included:

- A metro women's refuge supporting 607 clients on funding for 208 clients – 192% above funded capacity
- A women's refuge in regional NSW supporting 875 clients on funding for 424 – 106% above funded capacity

> "*It can be a matter of life and death – if we are stretched thin, we run the risk of failing to pick up on the warning signs towards escalating risk and harm*"
> – Women's refuge staff member

> "*Services are working above and beyond what they are contracted to support which is taking a toll on staff but also impacting the safety and wellbeing of women and children*"
> – Women's refuge staff member

Refuges were still forced to turn away an average of 66% of women who sought help, due to a lack of staff capacity, or a lack of available beds.

> "*The biggest challenge for me is the emotional impact of having to decide who is more in need and knowing that women leave one unsafe environment only to be forced into another"* – Women's refuge staff member

Refuges are operating with an average caseload per FTE that is 35% above contracted funding. Presented with an overwhelming number of women and children in crisis and at immediate risk of harm, women's refuges reported that their staff are taking on excessive client loads and working significant unpaid overtime, fundraising outside of paid work, and paying for food vouchers out of their own pocket.

> "*High caseloads and short time frames mean people often don't receive the level of care and support they need*" – Women's refuge staff member

Refuges are filling service gaps. Refuge staff highlighted that referral options for their clients are increasingly limited, with other Government funded support service including mental health, child, young people and family, legal aid, and social housing also at capacity with long waiting lists. Women's refuges are attempting to fill this gap, providing more intensive support for longer periods to help sustain women and children while they wait for other services. This level of support significantly exceeds their intended role and level of funding.

> "*We have become all the services that (women and children) can't access, the expectations of what we provide has grown and has become unrealistic"*
> – Women's refuge staff member

> "*One of the biggest changes we have seen is the increasing complexity of client needs alongside a significant reduction in the availability and accessibility of external support services*" – Women's refuge staff member

Refuges had 26.6% turnover in their frontline staff. Experienced women's refuge staff – paid relatively low wages and facing high demand with complex risks – are experiencing burn out and leaving the sector. High turnover and recruitment challenges due to unsustainable working conditions are creating a vicious cycle, simultaneously reducing service capacity and effectiveness while increasing stress for staff who remain. This is concerning for all refuges, but particularly those in regional NSW where the available pool of skilled staff is more limited.

> "*The amount of burn out and staff turnover in the industry would be reduced with better conditions and the ability to offer clients better services*" – Women's refuge staff member

Aboriginal-led refuges and community-controlled organisations need support

Aboriginal women and children need access to Aboriginal-led refuges that provide specialist safety and support grounded in culture, community and connection to Country.

DVNSW undertook consultations with members from Aboriginal-led services, which highlighted the importance of Aboriginal women having meaningful leadership and decision-making authority in how these refuges are designed and delivered.

Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) need practical support to develop and deliver refuge services. This includes funding for proposal development, governance, business and workforce planning, and access to property and capital works expertise. Investing in this capacity would enable ACCOs to further build on their community knowledge and relationships to establish and sustain locally appropriate refuges.

Similar to the broader women's refuge sector, the consultations also raised concerns about Aboriginal-led refuges operating with insufficient staffing and unfunded cultural responsibilities. Workers can be expected to provide frontline support, cultural guidance, supervision and organisational management across multiple roles. Sustainable core, operational funding needs to recognise this work, including Aboriginal caseworkers, children's workers, cultural roles, supervision and workforce development.

The situation is not sustainable

Women's refuges are a core component of the referral and recovery pathway for many victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. The Australian Government's *Rapid Review of Prevention Strategies (*2024) recognised the urgent need for more investment in specialist, trauma-informed crisis accommodation with wrap-around services and recommended improving alignment between the domestic and family violence and homelessness sectors.

The NSW Government's 2026-27 investment in frontline domestic and family violence programs, while essential, will also see more women and children referred to women's refuges and other specialist

homelessness services. Women's refuges will be unable to respond to this increased rate of referrals within their existing resources.

Every woman and child turned away from a refuge with critical support needs unmet, is put at risk of harm – either forced to return to violence or pushed further into homelessness and crisis.

A corresponding investment in women's refuges is urgently needed to expand their capacity.

Meeting the demand for services

Domestic Violence NSW welcomed the NSW Government's recent investments in homelessness including the $130 million Building Crisis Housing Plan (BCHP) and the $100 million Homelessness Innovation Fund (HIF). We also support the vision of the NSW Government's Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035 – to make homelessness rare, brief and not repeated.

For women and children experiencing homelessness due to domestic and family violence, women's refuges are a critical part of realising this vision.

When refuge beds become available, women and children cannot be accommodated unless women's refuges can provide staff. Specialist staff provide the expertise, planning and support that keeps women and children safe, facilitates their recovery, and supports self determination to regain their independence.

Women's refuges are delivering service provisions well beyond currently funded levels and facing the same cost and demand pressures as other frontline services.

Recommended investment

We recommend that the Government match its 2026-27 commitment with an equivalent 50% increase in core operational funding for women's refuges.

Based on the current estimated funding of $119.7 million, and applying NSW Treasury's forecast indexation rate of 2.5%, this investment would provide women's refuges with approximately $61 million in additional recurrent funding in 2027-28.

	2026-27 Current	2027-28 Projected
Women's Refuges – Baseline core SHS funding	$119.70 m	$122.69 m
Recommended 50% increase		$61.34m
TOTAL INVESTMENT		**$184.03m**

The core operational funding increase would:

- Bring contract funding into line with current demand and the actual level of service provision that women's refuges are providing.
- Increase the number of specialist frontline staff and bring caseloads back to manageable levels.
- Reduce staff burnout and improve retention, ensuring a more stable workforce.
- Enable services to provide culturally safe, accessible and tailored support, including for Aboriginal women and children, migrant and refugee women and children, and those facing intersecting barriers to safety and recovery.
- Provide capacity for earlier intervention, before women and children reach crisis point.

The proposed 50% increase in core operational funding must include existing SHS-funded Aboriginal-led refuges and recognise the full cost of delivering culturally responsive, specialist support. Alongside this uplift, supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to develop refuge services is important to strengthening Aboriginal-led responses and ensuring Aboriginal women and children have a genuine choice of refuge support within the community.

Avoided costs

In 2016, KPMG estimated that domestic and family violence against women and children costs the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments $4.1 billion each year (2014-15 dollars)[15]. The NSW Government bears an estimated 14% of these costs through the broader health, justice, and human services sectors, equating to almost **$780 million per annum in 2025-26 dollars[1].**

The NSW Government also recognises the high cost to the NSW economy and state budget of homelessness driven by domestic and family violence. For example, the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) benefits database[16] estimates:

- A benefit of between $14,881 and $28,470 for every avoided episode of crisis accommodation in a refuge; and
- A broader economic benefit of $6,421 for every woman that avoids a further domestic and family violence assault that results in an ADVO or homelessness[2].

This investment and timely and effective intervention – with trauma and domestic violence-informed crisis accommodation and specialist case management – will keep women and children safe, support their long-term recovery and deliver significant savings to NSW Government.

Full implementation of DCJ's *Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Data Strategy*, combined with recommended improvements in data collection from unfunded refuges, will also enable the Government to better quantify the benefits of this investment over time.

[1] KPMG identified Commonwealth, state and territory governments bear 19 per cent of total costs ($21.7 billion x 19% = $4.1 billion) associated with the impact of family and domestic violence on women and children (2014–15 dollars). Our estimate assumes 50% of these costs are attributable to states and territories, with 28% of this borne by NSW Government based on the incidence of domestic and family violence. Costs have been escalated using a cumulative inflation (CPI) rate for NSW of 35.76%.

[2] Fusarelli et al (2026): Benefit Table References:

- HO16 – Client avoids entering Crisis Accommodation (small to medium refuge): $28,470 per person per episode
- HO17 – Client avoids entering Crisis Accommodation (large refuge): $14,881 per person per episode
- SA7 – Client avoids intimate partner assault (IPV) resulting in apprehended violence order or homelessness: $6,421 per person per episode

Quality Practice Standards – a shared foundation for a skilled, consistent DFV response

RECOMMENDATION 2: Fund Phase 1 of the Quality Practice Standards implementation across the domestic and family violence workforce ($3.99 million).

The role of the Quality Practice Standards

Every victim-survivor deserves a safe, skilled and consistent response, whenever they reach out to specialist domestic and family violence support in NSW. The Quality Practice Standards (the Standards) provide a shared framework for achieving this.

Developed over three years by the specialist domestic and family violence sector, the Standards reflect extensive sector consultation involving 88 services and 499 participants, bringing together people with lived expertise, specialist services, sector partners and a First Nations Working Group. They define quality practice through an intersectional lens, recognising diverse experiences and placing First Nations voices and self-determination at the centre.

The Standards also establish a framework for accountability, supporting organisations to assess and strengthen service quality, while creating a safer, more supportive and accountable workplace where all staff are equipped to deliver quality practice.

The Standards represent a significant, sector-led investment in the foundations of a stronger specialist response to domestic and family violence. However, implementing them requires more than their publication. It depends on access to a centralised digital resource hub that brings together Standards-aligned training, educational resources, practical implementation tools and specialised guidance.

This must be supported by the mechanisms to monitor how the Standards are being used, assess their impact on service delivery and victim-survivor outcomes, identify implementation gaps and provide consistent, centralised updates as practice, sector and government needs evolve.

While effective implementation will require a five-year process (see Appendix C – *Quality Practice Standards implementation timeline*), this pre-budget submission seeks funding for Phase 1 to deliver the digital hub, Recognition Framework, workforce development resources, and monitoring framework.

The need for implementation funding

The NSW Government committed to developing and implementing service quality standards in the Workforce Development Strategy 2025–2035 (Action 2.1)[17], with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) funding Domestic Violence NSW to lead the co-design process from 2023 to June 2026.

Funding was provided in 2026-27 for the development for the development of a suite of practice tools and resources to support implementation of the Standards, which is currently underway with sector input (See Appendix D)[18]. However, other critical elements of the first-year implementation plan remain unfunded. These include establishment of a steering committee, development of a monitoring and evaluation framework, and delivery of capability-building activities. Funding for these components is sought through this submission.

Publishing the Standards is not the same as implementing them. Without multi-year investment in governance, implementation support, training, evaluation and continuous improvement, the Standards risk remaining a set of documents rather than becoming an active quality framework that drives consistent practice and service improvement across the specialist domestic and family violence sector.

This investment will establish the infrastructure, resources and support mechanisms required for sector-wide implementation of the Standards, including governance arrangements, implementation guidance, training, communities of practice, evaluation and ongoing refinement. It will also enable DVNSW to identify and report on barriers to implementation, including any future workforce and resourcing requirements needed to support long-term adoption across the sector.

Victoria invested 66 per cent of its $97 million family violence reform package into training, practice tools, change management and leadership[19]. NSW now has a similar opportunity to ensure the Standards and the Common Approach to Risk Assessment and Safety (CARAS) are supported by the implementation infrastructure, resources and organisational change mechanisms required for sustainable sector-wide adoption.

What investment will deliver

Our proposed $3.99 million investment over three years would fund DVNSW to commence Phase 1 implementation across the NSW specialist DFV sector. This will establish the foundations for consistent implementation across the specialist domestic and family violence sector through delivery of:

- **The digital knowledge hub and training**, providing workers and services with practical Standards-aligned resources, tools and learning opportunities
- **The Frontline Investment Recommendations Report**, identifying the workforce and organisational capacity required for implementation and informing future investment priorities.
- **The Recognition Framework**, providing a consistent mechanism for services to demonstrate their progress against the Standards.
- **The monitoring system**, generating data on uptake, implementation and emerging needs to support continuous improvement and accountability, carried forward from year 1.
- **The Steering Committee**, ensuring implementation is informed by sector expertise and that resources, training and support evolve in response to evidence and emerging needs, carried forward from year 1.

Together, these components provide the infrastructure needed to support consistent, sustainable and evidence-informed implementation of the Standards across NSW.

Consolidate sector resources and training through a digital knowledge hub

The NSW Workforce Development Strategy 2025–2035 recognises the need for a statewide information hub. Action 5.4 proposes exploring its feasibility, so that domestic and family violence agencies, programs, services, roles and responsibilities can be shared clearly[20].

Throughout the three years of Quality Practice Standards consultation the sector called for workforce development tools, training and resources to be centralised in one place, held by DVNSW as the sector's peak body. Service leaders reiterated this call on stage at the DVNSW 2026 Conference. A centralised digital hub would reduce duplication, improve access to consistent practice resources and support a more connected and capable specialist workforce across NSW.

DVNSW proposes expanding the scope of the information hub to establish a digital knowledge hub that supports the Strategy's workforce development initiatives. It would bring together sector information, Standards-aligned learning, practice tools and resources, making them accessible to all specialist workers regardless of which NSW Government program or department funds their service.

DVNSW will consolidate existing sector training and resources into the hub. It will audit and migrate current materials, update them where needed and retire outdated content. Consolidating existing

resources will ensure new investment is directed towards genuine gaps in workforce capability and practice support, rather than duplicating resources that already exist.

DVNSW will maintain and manage the hub as an ongoing resource. This includes developing content, updating it as practice, sector and government needs change, and supporting users. Phase 1 funding will support the roles required to undertake this work (See Appendix E). First Nations content will be guided and approved by the First Nations Working Group, with co-authorship across relevant tools, resources and training.

Fund training, communities of practice and leadership development so services can embed the standards

Training, communities of practice, leadership development and regional activation will build the capability of practitioners, leaders and organisations to implement and embed the Standards. Leadership development in change management, governance and workplace learning, combined with local implementation champions and peer-learning networks, will support consistent adoption across NSW and help services sustain continuous improvement over time.

These investments will strengthen the sector's capacity to deliver culturally responsive, intersectional care for victim-survivors with disability, older women, and those from multicultural and First Nations communities and from diverse sexualities and genders. They will also support workforce wellbeing and retention by equipping workers to navigate emotionally demanding, high-risk practice, helping to prevent burnout and mitigate the impacts of vicarious trauma.

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation

The Quality Practice Standards Steering Committee will be established in 2027–28, with sector, lived experience, First Nations and diverse community representation. It will oversee implementation, monitoring and evaluation. DVNSW recommends that the Steering Committee meet quarterly.

Monitoring will track progress across three measurement domains:

- **Implementation infrastructure:** Are key implementation elements, such as the digital hub, training resource migration and the Recognition Framework, in place on time and fit for purpose?
- **Sector engagement:** Are services and practitioners aware of the Standards, registered on the hub and using Standards-aligned tools in everyday practice?
- **Workforce development activity:** Do training, communities of practice and leadership development activities build capability, and do participants apply their learning in practice?

At each meeting, DVNSW will report on key metrics and recommend adjustments to the implementation activities including training delivery, hub content and support for services.

The Foundation Evaluation (2028–29) will inform Phase 1 delivery, while the Phase 1 Evaluation (by June 2030) will inform Phase 2. Indicators, baselines and reporting timelines are set out in Appendix F.

Development of a co-designed Recognition Framework

Designed as a practice development tool, the Standards require a framework through which practitioners and services can assess their progress and identify priorities for further development.

A Recognition Framework, co-designed and user-tested with the sector during Phase 1 and launched by June 2030, will provide a consistent mechanism for services and practitioners to demonstrate their progress against the Standards. Participating practitioners and services will assess their current practice, identify development priorities and develop readiness plans before progressing towards recognition.

Facilitated through the digital hub, this approach will support continuous improvement and embedding the Standards, rather than treating implementation as a one-off compliance exercise. It will also provide government and the sector with greater visibility of practice development, capability gaps and areas requiring further investment.

Assessing the frontline investment needed to embed the standards

The 50 per cent funding increase announced in June 2026 across six DFV-specific programs will help address existing workforce pressures. Its effect on implementation capacity cannot yet be fully assessed, because some affected programs were still awaiting funding announcements in November 2026.

DVNSW's Sector Development Surveys show that cost and lack of time are the main barriers to workforce development. Cost was identified as a barrier by 68 per cent of respondents in 2025 and 67 per cent in 2026. Lack of time rose from 53 per cent to 73 per cent over the same period. Access to training and resources alone is not enough. Services need staff time to take part in professional development and communities of practice, and to put change into everyday practice.

This submission does not request frontline capacity funding. Instead, DVNSW will prepare a Frontline Investment Recommendations Report in 2027–28. The report will quantify the workforce capacity needed to implement the Standards and recommend funding and equitable distribution arrangements. This will provide government with an evidence base to inform future investment decisions, and help ensure services across metropolitan, regional and remote NSW have equitable access to implementation support.

Projected costs

Delivering Phase 1 (2027–2030) requires an investment of $3.99 million.

Phase 2 (2030-31 and 2031-32) is not part of this request and has been included for context. It delivers the completion of the Recognition Framework and the transition from implementation into core operational delivery. DVNSW estimates Phase 2 at $2.59 million and will confirm this in 2028-2029.

Costs by category, rounded to the nearest thousand ($)

Phase 1 costings are modelled below, see *Appendix E – Quality Practice Standards roles and funded FTE* for a complete breakdown.

	Phase 1 costs				Phase 2 costs (not part of this submission)		
Cost category	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	Three years	2030-31*	2031-32*	Five years*
Staffing	701	570	770	2,042	927	535	3,505
Technology	85	74	74	233	84	78	395
Audience and awareness	20	20	15	55	0	0	55
Consulting and content	159	120	105	384	66	71	520
Travel and events	78	78	84	240	84	68	391
Other operating	84	76	93	253	99	66	418
Management fee	276	230	280	786	309	200	1,295
Total	$1,404	$1,167	$1,422	**$3,992**	$1,569	$1,018	**$6,580**

* *Indicates costs are estimates and will be confirmed in 2028-29.*

NOTE: Totals may not add due to rounding. The digital knowledge hub is intended to be an ongoing sector resource and will require operational funding beyond the implementation period. This request does not include operational funding beyond 2031-32.

The outcome

Phase 1 will establish the infrastructure, capability and support needed to embed a shared understanding of quality domestic and family violence practice across NSW.

For government, this is a staged, costed and measurable investment. Monitoring and evaluation will provide early evidence of progress, inform future implementation decisions and support targeted investment. Implementation data will also contribute to DCJ's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Data Strategy.

For the sector, services will gain shared tools, training and implementation support and a recognition pathway co-designed with practitioners and service leaders. The approach is designed to support equitable access across metropolitan, regional and remote NSW.

For victim-survivors, the result will be safer, more consistent and more skilled responses, wherever they seek help in NSW.

Conclusion

Strong foundations keep women and children safe. The NSW Government has an opportunity to build on its recent investments and strengthen the specialist domestic and family violence system for the future. Women's refuges and the specialist domestic and family violence workforce are two parts of the same foundation, and both need investment now.

A 50% increase in core operational funding would improve the sustainability of women's refuges. It would enable services to retain specialist staff, reduce caseload pressures and respond to more of the women and children who are currently turned away, particularly as other frontline investments increase referrals.

Funding Phase 1 of the Quality Practice Standards would strengthen the workforce capability behind every response. The Standards provide a shared framework for quality practice, but implementation requires sustained investment, workforce development and organisational support. this funding would build the long-term capability, consistency and accountability of the specialist sector.

These investments depend on each other. Refuges can only deliver safe, high-quality support with a skilled and supported workforce. The Standards provide the framework for consistent, evidence-informed practice, but their impact depends on investment in the implementation infrastructure needed to support adoption, monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement across the sector.

DVNSW calls on the NSW Government to partner with the specialist sector to deliver both investments. Together they will strengthen the refuge system and the specialist workforce that underpins it, helping ensure that women and children experiencing domestic and family violence can access safe, skilled and consistent support, wherever they live in NSW.

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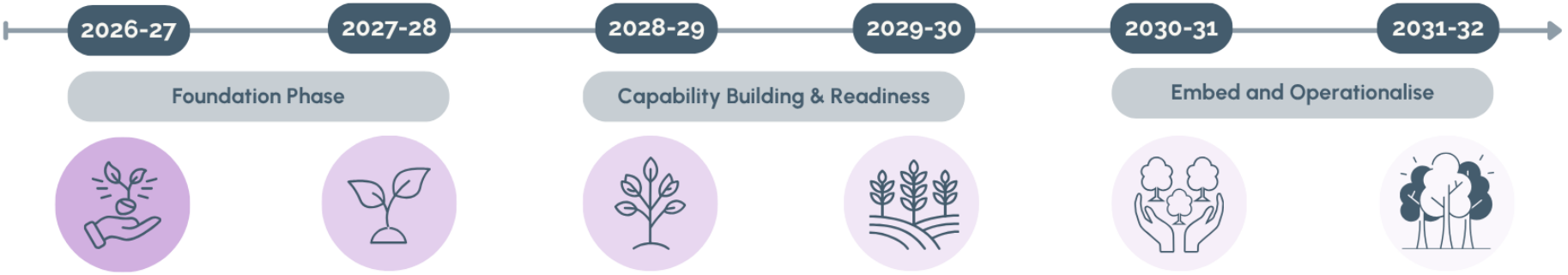
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Appendix A – DVNSW refuge member survey

Available on request.

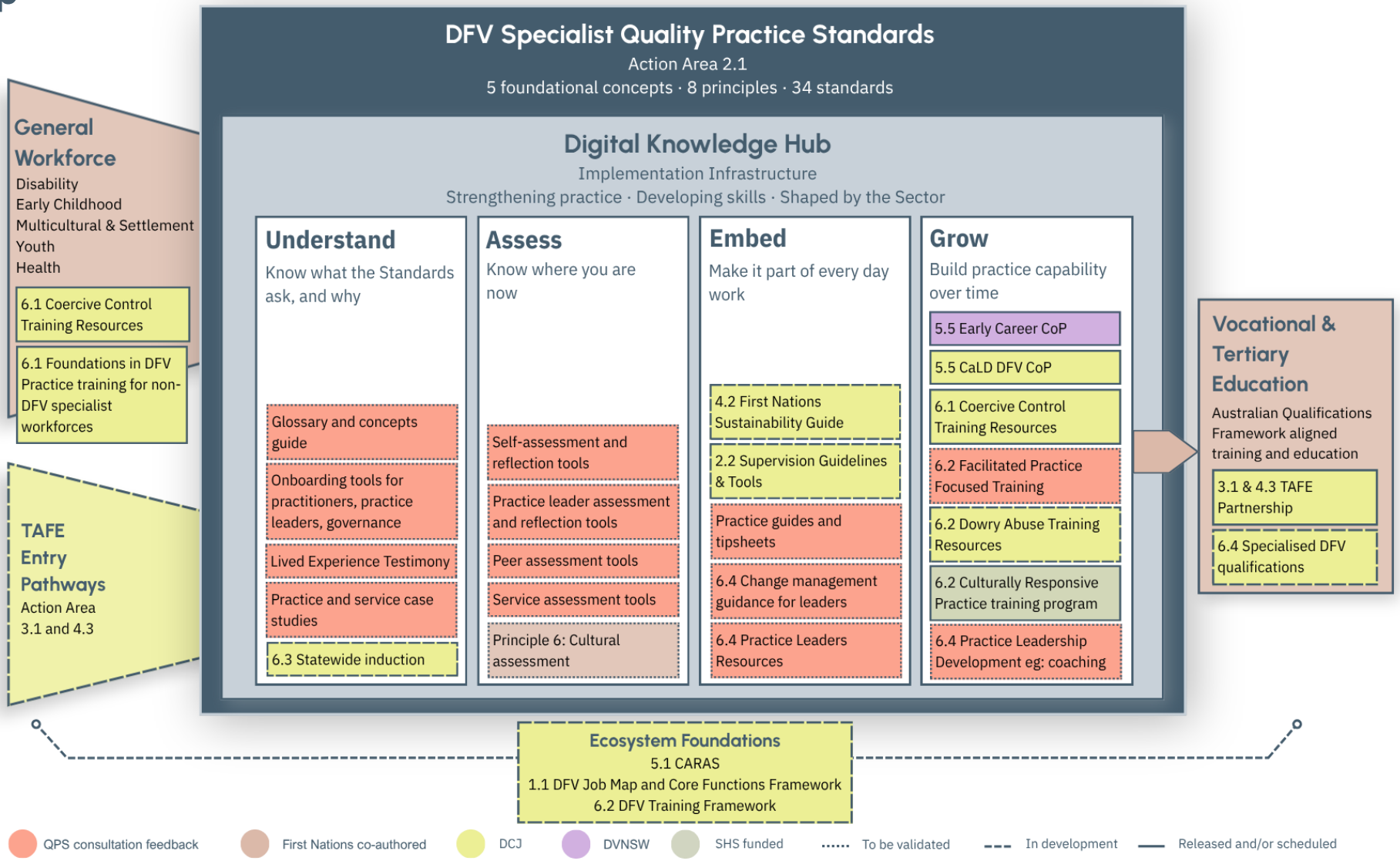
Appendix C – Quality Practice Standards implementation timeline



	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32
Sector Assets & Infrastructure	***Develop tools and resources (GPG)*** Funded and underway	Digital knowledge hub in development and launched GPG tools and resources launched	Relevant content migrated Configure Recognition framework in hub New training and CoP released	Sector training package for full implementation developed	Ongoing updates and releases of tools, training and CoP as informed by sector, data and legislative or program changes	Ongoing updates and releases of tools, training and CoP as informed by sector, data and legislative or program changes
Governance & Leadership		QPS Steering Committee established	Quarterly Steerco meetings to monitor implementation and inform any adjustments	Quarterly Steerco meetings to monitor implementation and inform any adjustments	Quarterly Steerco meetings to monitor implementation and inform any adjustments	DVNSW stewardship role to transition Recognition accreditation
Adoption & Capability Building		Sector communication, consultation and co-design on GPG tools QPS onboarding Re-launch of migrated training	Regional roadshow/forum Leadership development toolkit, CoP and coaching User-test Recognition framework	Recruitment and onboarding of trainers Regional and remote training Recognition framework launched	Services work through Recognition Framework Trainers in place to deliver training, CoP and coaching	Completion of Recognition Framework
Monitoring & Evaluation		Establish monitoring and evaluation framework Frontline Investment Recommendation Report (FIRR) Recognition Framework co-design	Foundation Phase Report Implement recommendations from FIRR Quarterly reports to Steerco	Phase 1 Evaluation Quarterly reports to Steerco Ongoing coordination and monitoring of FIRR	Quarterly reports to Steerco Monitoring of Recognition framework implementation	Quarterly reports to Steerco Monitoring of Recognition framework implementation Phase 2 Evaluation

Funded Proposed in 2027-28 Pre-Budget Submission Proposed Phase 2 - indicative in 2027-28 Pre-Budget Submission

Appendix D – Quality Practice Standards workforce development ecosystem map



Appendix E – Quality Practice Standards roles and funded FTE

Role	Classification	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	Purpose	End
Implementation Manager	SCHADS Level 7	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	Leads implementation across all streams and line manages delivery staff	June 2032
Coordinator - Hub and Training Operations	SCHADS Level 6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	Nil	Hub coordination, administration and training operations	After 2030-31
Coordinator - Governance and Evaluation	SCHADS Level 6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	Steering Committee, Recognition Framework, frontline investment work, evaluation	June 2032
Learning Designer	SCHADS Level 6	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.6	Nil	Hub content and modules. Oversees migration of sector training and resources.	After 2030-31
Business Analyst	Contract	Six months	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	LMS build and integrations	December 2027
Trainer / Facilitator	SCHADS Level 6	Nil	Nil	1.0	2.0	1.0	Blended training, regional delivery	Ends June 2032.
Sector Development Manager	SCHADS Level 8	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	Sector engagement and alignment with existing sector development work	Ongoing
Communications	SCHADS Level 5	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	Hub, training and implementation communications	Ongoing

Salary costs are based on SCHADS Award rates (MA000100). Recruitment costs are included in the staffing line

Appendix F – Monitoring framework: indicators, baselines and reporting

Domain	Measure	Baseline	When reported
Implementation infrastructure	Key deliverables met on time: Steering Committee, digital hub launch, Recognition Framework co-design, Frontline Investment Recommendations Report	Implementation plan, set in Year 1	Quarterly to the Steering Committee; phase evaluations
	Tools audited, aligned and migrated; duplicate tools avoided	Set in Year 1	Phase evaluations
Sector engagement	Sector awareness of the Standards and the digital hub	Set in Year 1	Phase evaluations
	Specialist services and practitioners registered on the digital hub with completed onboarding	Set in Year 1	From digital hub launch, at each phase evaluation
	Return visits and engagement with hub resources	Set at launch	Quarterly to the Steering Committee; phase evaluations
	Services reporting use of Standards-aligned tools in everyday practice	Set in Year 1	Phase evaluations
	Practice and service outcomes in participating services	Set during the Foundation phase	Phase evaluations
Workforce development	Engagement and completion, by region, priority population groups serviced, and funding stream	Set at launch	Phase evaluations
	Participants reporting progress on their work goals, three months after training	Set at launch	Quarterly to the Steering Committee; phase evaluations
	Barriers to training reported by workers	Per 2026 Sector Development Survey	Repeated at each phase evaluation