

MEDIA RELEASE

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New Domestic Violence Survey in NSW Shows Impact of COVID-19 on the Rise

Women's Safety NSW is surveying its members who are frontline women's domestic violence workers across NSW on a weekly basis to map the impact COVID-19 is having on themselves as workers, their services and the women, children and families they are supporting.

This week's results have just come in and reveal the impact of COVID-19 is on the rise with a higher percentage of frontline domestic violence workers reporting:

- An increase in client numbers overall (50% up from 41% last week)
- Increasing complexity of client needs (75% up from 70.8% last week)
- Escalating or worsening violence (50% up from 44.9% last week)
- Violence specifically relating to COVID-19 (50% up from 36.2% last week)
- A sharp increase in violence being reported for the first time (47.5% up from 15.9% last week).

"What we're observing is a ramping up on each indicator", says Hayley Foster, Women's Safety NSW chief executive officer. "Not only are we seeing increased client numbers in more locations, we're also seeing instances where the COVID-19 pandemic is contributing to more extreme violence and abuse as well as cases where violence is erupting in relationships for the first time."

Whilst client need is increasing, frontline domestic violence workers are under increased pressure to deliver the services women and children need for their safety and support. 82.5% of frontline workers surveyed reported adapting to new procedures in COVID-19 conditions was a significant challenge, 60% reported difficulties in working from home, 62.5% said they were experiencing higher work pressure and 70% said isolation was a key issue in them being required to work from home.

Women's Safety NSW has been working alongside other peaks in advising the NSW and Federal Governments on the key priority areas for resourcing the domestic violence sector in its continued support of victim-survivors through the COVID-19 crisis. This advice has been directly drawn from the frontline.

"Frontline women's domestic violence workers have told us that the number one priority right now is to resource them to effectively transition to a remote service model [working from home], followed by additional staffing capacity to help deal with the increasing number of highly complex cases coming through" says Foster "And I'm afraid we can't spend weeks planning this. The sector is under pressure right now."

Foster notes that it is not just domestic violence services that are under pressure, service options to refer clients are down too with 75% of frontline workers surveyed identifying insufficient service availability as a key issue facing clients. This compared with 65.2% last week.

“This is a critical juncture”, says Foster “We know the current conditions under COVID-19 are escalating risks for domestic violence victims. We must ensure the services that they rely upon for their safety and support are adequately resourced for the task.”

In the wake of the Federal Government’s pending decisions as to what measures shall be funded under its \$150 million domestic violence package, Women’s Safety NSW members’ advice is as follows:

“The biggest service gap identified was again case management support for clients with complex needs [77.5%], followed by income and material needs [72.5%], then crisis and ongoing accommodation [70%] and finally increased safe technologies, such as safe phones [57.5%]” says Foster. “These are the same recommendations as last week, only the urgency has stepped up a notch.”

Women’s Safety NSW will meet with its members today in an online forum whereby the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and Legal Aid NSW will provide an update from the government and participate in a question and answer session with frontline workers around the new and pending COVID-19 measures.

“We’ve been really impressed with the level of consultation and engagement by the NSW Government with the women’s safety and domestic violence sectors throughout this period” says Foster. “It is reassuring to know the Department has real time information available to them from the frontline in order to inform their decision making.”

ABOUT:

Women’s Safety NSW is a peak representative body for women’s specialist domestic and family violence services. Our purpose is to advocate on behalf of our members for women’s safety, justice and wellbeing in the context of domestic and family violence through policy, practice, law reform and cultural change.

Our full members – Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service workers – supported 51,383 women across NSW last year through:

- NSW’s integrated response to domestic and family violence, Safer Pathway, in 43 metropolitan, regional and rural locations;
- The Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program in 117 local courts across the state; and
- The Family Advocacy Support Service in Family Law Registries.



Advocating for freedom
from violence

Our associate members are women's specialist domestic violence workers working in a variety of services including staying home leaving violence, women's health, women's supported accommodation, women's counselling, and women's legal services.

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