

MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release: 26 May 2020

Welcome reprieve for frontline domestic violence services in NSW in a \$21 mil joint rescue package

The Attorney General and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Mark Speakman today announced a \$21 million joint rescue package for the frontline domestic violence services sector to assist them in dealing with the increased severity of cases and complexity of work as violence and abuse has continued to rise behind closed doors during the pandemic. \$8.8 million is NSW's share of the first \$32.5 million of the Commonwealth's \$150 million COVID-19 Women's Safety package. \$12.8 million is a contribution directly from the NSW Government.

The full details of the package are yet to be announced, but the vast bulk of these funds will go to frontline domestic and family violence services, including the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS) who have been supporting tens of thousands of women during the pandemic following a police incident.

"These are the services that reported an [increase in client numbers of more than 10 per cent in March this year](#)" says Hayley Foster, Women's Safety NSW chief executive officer. "They have been consistently providing critical services to women experiencing domestic and family violence right throughout the COVID-19 lockdown, adapting their service models, and offering more intensive support to women in extremely high-risk situations. It is really a relief they are finally receiving some additional support."

Women's refuges will likewise receive a welcome boost, with a number of services reporting a surge in direct referrals as lockdown restrictions ease. Importantly, Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) services will also receive a top up in funding. These services support women and their children to stay home safely following violence, with the abuser removed. Accompanying this, will be funding for temporary accommodation for abusers who have been removed from a family home due to their behaviour.

"This is an important policy shift", says Foster. "It acknowledges that the responsibility for violence and abuse and all its consequences lies with the person that chooses to use that behaviour, rather than the targets or victims of that abuse."

Women's Safety NSW understands there will be a range of other important inclusions announced by the NSW Government shortly. However, notes there are still some important gaps as well as key considerations for future funding allocations of the Commonwealth \$150 million COVID-19 Women's Safety package.

"We need to ensure we are evidence-based in targeting our funding" says Foster. "We need to channel the additional funding to areas where victim-survivors of violence and abuse are actually going for help, and to invest in strategies for getting help to those who are finding it hard to access safety and support."

Foster says key priorities are ensuring victim-survivors can access safety and support through online WebChat, something that is not currently available in NSW, and that culturally safe and specific avenues for accessing support for younger people, people with disabilities and people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer communities are made available.

Notably, there is still no targeted support for women on temporary visas experiencing violence in this package, and this group is at particular risk with extremely limited access to any crisis income or accommodation support, as tragically highlighted last week when international student, [Kamaljeet Sidhu was found allegedly murdered](#) by her husband who she had continued living with after obtaining an apprehended violence order for her protection a month earlier.

“The reality is, we need to act quicker and smarter when it comes to tackling this crisis”, says Foster. “For around eight weeks now, we’ve been providing some very nuanced advice to the government on an almost daily basis as to what needs to happen and in the end this first round of funding has been distributed in a fairly blunt manner.”

Women’s Safety NSW also warn the NSW Government that any band-aid measures during the COVID-19 crisis will need to be accompanied by longer-term, sustainable support.

“The country’s domestic violence crisis isn’t going away anytime soon. We’re heading into a deep economic downturn, and we know that with recessions come increased violence against women and children,” says Foster. “What we need is a coherent, coordinated, sustainable plan with flexible features built in so that we can be confident women, children and families impacted by violence and abuse have real options for achieving safety in their homes.”

Women’s Safety NSW looks forward to working with the NSW Government alongside key sector partners to ensure the essential funding announced today flows through to services as soon as practicable and that the remaining distributions of the Commonwealth funding package are well targeted and go to where they are needed most.

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:



Advocating for freedom
from violence

- 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.

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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