

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Women's safety submission calls for \$12 billion domestic violence plan**

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> Sept 2020

Women's Safety NSW has released its submission to the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Parliamentary inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence calling for \$12 billion over 12 years to invest in evidence-based solutions to the nation's domestic and family violence scourge.

The peak body for women's specialist domestic violence services in NSW will also be appearing before the Committee at midday today where it will canvass the key elements of its roadmap to women's safety, and answer questions as put to it by the twelve participating members of the Inquiry.

At its core, Women's Safety NSW points to a lack of investment in tackling violence against women and children at the Federal level, with just \$110 million per annum in core funding directly dedicated to addressing an issue which affects close to half a million Australian women and their children every year.

*"The critical message to the Committee today is that if we want to see a reduction in violence against women in this country, we need to commit to an adequately funded plan" says Hayley Foster, Chief Executive Officer of Women's Safety NSW. "You can't move a mountain of this magnitude with a bunch of shovels."*

The submission directly addresses each of the terms of reference for the Inquiry but highlights some key areas for immediate action.

*"We must address the gaping holes in the domestic and family violence support systems for adult and child victim-survivors and abusers of violence, as well as the problems in our civil, criminal and family law systems which can prove an ineffective bottom line for dangerous behaviour, but we cannot take our eye off the nation-wide project of addressing the damaging violence-supportive attitudes and conditions which allow violence against women to thrive in our communities", says Ms Foster.*

On preventing violence, Women's Safety NSW recommend investment in an implementation plan for the [Our Watch Change the Story Framework](#): *"We've got a clear framework for reform to change culture and save lives, let's invest in its implementation so we can start driving down rates of violence perpetration" says Ms Foster.*

On services for victims and abusers, the focus is on ensuring universal access, regardless of a person's geographical location or other factors: *"We need to actually roll programs out either face-to-face or through technologies to all victims and abusers*

*in the country, and make them fully accessible because if we don't support families in crisis, we can't break the cycle of devastation."*

In assessing the impact of COVID-19 on domestic and family violence and the Government's response to this crisis, Women's Safety NSW point primarily to the significant delays in responding to the calls of the experts and in delivering much needed funds to the ground. *"We provided clear advice to the Government in March as to what was urgently needed, but many vital services didn't receive any relief until July, and some still haven't received funds despite a doubling in demand"*, relates Ms Foster. *Over half of our member services surveyed in August say they need more funding so that women can access the support they need at this time to be safe."*

Women's Safety NSW's submission also focuses on the civil, criminal justice and family law systems and the way in which these systems need to be reformed and be more integrated so women and children can rely upon them for safety and justice. In this regard, overseas lessons are going to be brought before the Committee's attention.

*"We really think Australian governments need to look to some of the innovations internationally, such as making it possible for victims of domestic violence to call police silently, criminalising coercive control and establishing women's police stations or having women's services collocated with police"*, continues Ms Foster. *"And we need to speed up the process of specialising and integrating our civil, criminal justice and family law systems so they have the expertise within them to deal with domestic, family and sexual violence matters effectively and in a streamlined way with a focus on safety."*

Finally, the submission addresses governance and accountability for national domestic and family violence policy and makes a number of key recommendations for ensuring real progress is made towards the aim of reducing violence against women and their children under the next national plan.

Says Ms Foster *"We need measurable targets, nationally consistent data collection and reporting, co-design of policy with the experts, a transparent accountability mechanism and the development of a national women's safety peak body to hold the government to account on its performance."*

The Committee Hearing will be broadcast live on the Parliament House website: <https://www.aph.gov.au/live>

### **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 136 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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