



Family &
Community Services
Housing NSW

Domestic and Family Violence **Housing NSW Policy Statement**

November 2010

1. INTRODUCTION

Housing NSW recognises that domestic and family violence has a serious and harmful impact on victims and their families. Housing NSW is committed to reducing the effects of domestic violence by improving access to safe and affordable housing, and providing appropriate and timely housing assistance.

2. DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE¹

Domestic and family violence includes physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and verbal abuse. It can also take the form of social or economic abuse, harassment and/or stalking. These various forms of abuse often occur simultaneously. It involves violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour carried out by an adult against a partner or family member to control and dominate that person and causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can also affect the family's social and financial wellbeing. It is most often perpetrated by a man against a woman however it also occurs in same sex and other domestic relationships. Many forms of domestic violence are offences under the NSW Crimes Act 1900².

Domestic violence occurs across all groups and cultures and patterns of violent behaviour can be inter-generational. Some victims of domestic and family violence have specific and or additional needs that warrant more targeted responses, for example those who experience violence while living with a disability, mental health needs, drug and alcohol addictions or those who are recent migrants or refugees.

3. IMPACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

3.1 Homelessness

Research has demonstrated that domestic violence is a key cause of homelessness for women in Australia³. In 2007/08 52% of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) clients were women, 19% with children. Domestic violence was the most cited reason for women accessing SAAP services. Homelessness can lead to lack of connection with community, isolation, and it can adversely impact on physical and mental health.

3.2 Impact upon Children and Young People

Living with domestic violence has a damaging effect on children and young people and may constitute a form of child abuse. Children and young people who witness domestic violence may be at risk of serious physical or psychological harm. Domestic Violence affects a carer's ability to secure a stable environment for children. Government and non-government agencies have a legal responsibility to protect children and young people at risk of harm.

1 Where this document refers to Domestic Violence, it is understood that it also includes Family Violence

2 See NSW Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan 2010, *Stop the Violence, End the Silence* www.women.nsw.gov.au

3 Tually, Faulkner, Cutler and Slatter (2008) *Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness*, Adelaide, Flinders Institute for Housing, Urban and Regional Research

4. NSW GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The NSW Government is committed to making women's and children's lives safer through the implementation of these key strategies:

- NSW Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan, ***Stop the Violence, End the Silence*** launched in June 2010. The Action Plan provides a strategy for Government, non-government organisations and the community to work together better to both prevent domestic and family violence and respond more effectively when it happens.
- ***NSW Homelessness Action Plan, A Way Home: Reducing Homelessness in NSW 2009-14***. A priority of the NSW Homelessness Action Plan is to provide safe, appropriate long-term accommodation and/or support to people experiencing domestic and family violence, relationship and family breakdown and at key transition points. The Action Plan sets the direction for state-wide reform of the homelessness service sector, increasing the focus of the service system on prevention and long-term accommodation and support, rather than crisis intervention.
- ***Keep Them Safe: A Shared Approach to Child Wellbeing*** is the NSW Government's five-year plan to reform the child protection system in NSW. Keep Them Safe includes many initiatives to support families affected by violence.

The NSW Government recognises that domestic violence victims require a flexible approach to service provision, with responses provided by Government and non-government organisations in partnership. Further information on Government help and initiatives can be found at:

- [Community Services Domestic Violence Pages](#)
- [NSW Office for Women's Policy pages](#)

5. HOUSING NSW RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Housing NSW is committed to assisting in the reduction of domestic violence and its effects by improving victim's access to safe, affordable and appropriate accommodation and housing services.

5.1 Domestic Violence Housing Initiatives

Housing NSW recognises that sometimes it is in the best interests of women and children to be provided with support so that they can remain safely in the family home. In other cases, it will be appropriate for the women to move to new accommodation. Housing NSW's ***Start Safely*** has been developed to support women (and their children) who are leaving domestic violence. Start Safely is a subsidy which provides short to medium term financial help to women so that they can secure private rental accommodation and do not have to return to their homes. Start Safely is not intended for people with long-term support needs.

Housing NSW is also a partner in **Staying Home, Leaving Violence** (SHLV) an initiative led by Community Services which aims to increase victims' safety and prevent homelessness, by providing tailored strategies to enable the victim and children to remain in their home. The service model includes outreach support, risk assessment, safety planning, security equipment, court support and casework and advocacy. SHLV is available in eighteen locations across NSW, and in those locations Housing NSW teams work in partnership with the local SHLV service. Housing NSW provides appropriate security upgrades and modifications to tenants supported by SHLV and other outreach services.

5.2 Provision of Housing Assistance through **Housing Pathways**

Housing NSW and participating community housing providers provide a range of housing assistance to help eligible clients in need through **Housing Pathways**, the common access system. These include:

- **Medium and long-term social housing tenancies** – social housing provides secure, affordable housing, including priority housing, for people with a housing need on low to moderate incomes. Social housing encompasses properties owned or managed by Housing NSW, community housing providers or the Aboriginal Housing Office. Applicants will be considered for priority housing where their **application** shows that they have an urgent and ongoing housing need that they are unable to resolve for themselves in the private rental market.
- **Emergency Temporary Accommodation** – Housing NSW provides emergency temporary accommodation in low-cost hotels, motels, caravan parks and similar accommodation for people who are homeless or experience a housing crisis.
- **Crisis Accommodation** – Housing NSW funds the provision of crisis and transitional housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This housing is managed by registered community housing providers, some of which are specialist homelessness services, such as women's refuges that specifically target women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.
- **Housing with Support** – Housing NSW and community housing providers have entered into partnership with a range of support providers to enable people with complex needs to sustain their tenancies.
- **Assistance with access and sustain tenancies in the private rental market**, including **Rentstart** (provides financial assistance to low-income households renting in the private sector) **Tenancy Guarantee, Tenancy Facilitation and the Private Rental Brokerage Service**. These are provided through local Housing NSW offices.

5.3 Responding to Clients Affected by Domestic Violence

When responding to clients affected by domestic violence, social housing providers will:

- respect the client's right to privacy and confidentiality and make lawful decisions about disclosure of personal information
- consider the safety and wellbeing of the client (and any children and young people that may be part of the household) when assessing requests for assistance

- provide reliable and complete information to the client about their entitlements and options
- refer the client to appropriate services and support agencies.

5.4 Documentation to Support an Application

Sometimes social housing providers will need to ask victims of domestic violence to provide evidence to support an application for housing assistance or for security upgrades to properties. These requests will be reasonable and sensitive to the client's circumstances, and will not need to include evidence of actual violence as domestic violence takes many forms and will not necessarily result in physical harm. A list of documents can be found on the Housing Pathways website or through this [link](#).

6. WAYS TO ACCESS HOUSING ASSISTANCE

Women experiencing domestic violence can apply for housing assistance through their local [Housing NSW Office](#) or a [community housing provider](#), or by downloading information and application forms from the [Housing Pathways Website](#). Women with an urgent housing need (nowhere to stay tonight) can access help through:

- **Housing NSW Temporary Accommodation Service** on (freecall) 1800 152 152 – for after hours help
- **NSW Domestic Violence Line 1800 656 463** provides telephone counselling, information and referrals for people who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence. It can make referrals to specialist services (including homelessness services) that specifically target women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, for example women's refuges (see box opposite for some of the services available).

Refuges for women and children provide a range of services and support which can include (but are not limited to) the following:

- case work
- safe accommodation
- safety planning
- follow up support
- brokerage
- referrals
- outreach (for women and children not accommodated by the service)
- court support
- transitional housing
- group work for both women and children
- assistance with securing and maintaining long term stable housing

7. PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In certain circumstances, Housing NSW provides appropriate housing assistance to eligible perpetrators of domestic violence.



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