



Family &
Community
Services

Domestic and Family Violence

NSW Department of Family and Community Services
Housing NSW Policy Statement

September 2014

1. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Family and Community Services (Housing) recognises that domestic and family violence has a serious and harmful impact on victims and their families. FACS (Housing) is committed to reducing the effects of domestic and family violence by improving access to safe and affordable housing, and providing appropriate and timely housing assistance.

2. DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Domestic and family violence includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear. It is usually manifested as part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.

An intimate relationship refers to people who are (or have been) in an intimate partnership whether or not the relationship involves or has involved a sexual relationship, i.e. married or engaged to be married, separated, divorced, de facto partners (whether of the same or different sex), couples promised to each other under cultural or religious tradition, or dating.

A family relationship has a broader definition and includes people who are related to one another through blood, marriage or de facto partnerships, adoption and fostering relationships, sibling and extended family relationships. It includes the full range of kinship ties in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities, extended family relationships, and constructs of family within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ) communities. People living in the same house, people living in the same residential care facility and people reliant on care may also be considered to be in a domestic relationship if their relationship exhibits particular dynamics which may foster coercive and abusive behaviours.

The behaviours that may constitute domestic and family violence include:

- physical violence including physical assault or abuse
- sexual assault and other sexually abusive or coercive behaviour
- emotional or psychological abuse including verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse, including threats of violence
- economic abuse; for example denying a person reasonable financial autonomy or financial support
- stalking; for example harassment, intimidation or coercion of the other person's family in order to cause fear or ongoing harassment, including through the use of electronic communication or social media
- kidnapping or deprivation of liberty; for example unreasonably preventing the other person from making or keeping connections with her or his family or kin, friends, faith or culture
- damage to property, irrespective of whether the victim owns the property
- causing injury or death to an animal irrespective of whether the victim owns the animal.

3. IMPACTS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

3.1 Homelessness

Research has demonstrated that domestic and family violence is a key cause of homelessness in Australia. In 2012/13, 29% of people cited domestic and family violence as a reason for seeking assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services in NSW. Homelessness can lead to a lack of financial stability, community isolation and affect a person's participation in employment or education. Homelessness can also adversely impact on physical and mental health.

3.2 Impact upon Children and Young People

Living with domestic and family 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 and family violence may be at risk of serious physical or psychological harm. Domestic and family 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 significant harm.

4. NSW GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

The NSW Government is committed to making the lives of people experiencing domestic and family violence safer through the implementation of these key strategies:

- The new Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform [*It Stops Here: Standing together to end domestic and family violence in NSW*](#) introduces a unified and consistent level of support based around the needs of domestic violence victims. The DFV Framework is structured around five key reform elements: a strategic approach to prevention and early intervention; streamlined referral pathways to secure victims' safety and support recovery; accessible, flexible, person-centred service responses that make the best use of resources; a strong, skilled and capable workforce; and a strengthened criminal justice system response.
- [*NSW Domestic Violence Justice Strategy 2013-17*](#) is an operational framework that outlines the approaches and standards justice agencies in NSW will adopt to improve the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence. Its fundamental objectives are to make victims safer, hold perpetrators accountable and prevent domestic violence from occurring. The DVJS is a key element of the Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform.
- [*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 ensure children and young people are protected from being at risk of harm as a result of violence and also provides intervention and support families affected by violence.

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

- [Community Services Domestic Violence Pages](#)
- [FACS \(Women NSW\) website](#)

5. FACS HOUSING NSW RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

FACS (Housing) is committed to assisting in the reduction and prevention of domestic and family violence and its effects by improving victim access to safe, affordable and appropriate accommodation and housing services.

5.1 Domestic and Family Violence Housing Initiatives

FACS (Housing) recognises that sometimes it is in the best interests of a victim (and their 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 victim to move to new accommodation. [Start Safely](#) is a subsidy which provides short to medium term financial help to eligible clients leaving domestic and family violence so that they can secure private rental accommodation and do not have to return to their homes. [Start Safely](#) is targeted at people who require medium term (up to two years) financial assistance and support and who are capable of sustaining a tenancy independently after the subsidy period. [Start Safely](#) clients receive referral to a range of support services.

FACS (Housing) is also a partner in [Staying Home, Leaving Violence](#) (SHLV) an initiative led by FACS (Community Services) which aims to increase victim 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 FACS (Housing) teams work in partnership with the local SHLV service. FACS (Housing) provides appropriate security upgrades and modifications to tenants supported by SHLV and other outreach services.

5.2 Provision of Housing Assistance through [Housing Pathways](#)

FACS (Housing) 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 FACS (Housing), community housing providers or the FACS (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.
- Temporary Accommodation – FACS (Housing) provides temporary accommodation for up to 28 days in one year in low-cost hotels, motels, caravan parks and similar accommodation for people who are homeless or experience a housing crisis.
- Crisis Accommodation – FACS (Housing) 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 organisations, some of whom provide specialist homelessness services, such as women’s refuges that specifically target women and children affected by domestic and family violence.
- Housing with Support – FACS (Housing) 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 to 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 FACS (Housing) offices.

5.3 Responding to Clients Affected by Domestic and Family Violence

When responding to clients affected by domestic and family 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 and family violence to provide evidence to support an application for housing assistance or for security upgrades to properties. These requests must be reasonable and sensitive to the client’s circumstances. A list of documents can be found on the Housing Pathways website or through this [link](#).

6. WAYS TO ACCESS HOUSING ASSISTANCE

People experiencing domestic and family violence can apply for housing assistance through their local [FACS \(Housing\) Office](#), a [community housing provider](#), or by downloading information and application forms from the [Housing Pathways Website](#).

People with an urgent housing need (nowhere to stay tonight) can access help through:

- Link2home on (freecall) 1800 152 152
- [NSW Domestic Violence Line 1800 656 463](#) provides telephone counselling, information and referrals for people who are experiencing or have experienced domestic and family 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 below 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 AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

In certain circumstances, FACS (Housing) provides housing assistance to eligible perpetrators of domestic and family violence.



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