



Continued Impacts of COVID-19 on Domestic and Family Violence

4 September 2020

Women's Safety NSW acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging.



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Women's Safety NSW

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1. Introduction

1.1. About

Women's Safety NSW is a peak representative body for women's specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW – including all Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCASs) working in 136 Local Courts across NSW and in the Family Law Courts and coordinating the NSW Government's Victim Safety Response – Safer Pathway.

We advocate on behalf of our members for systemic reform to increase women's safety, justice and wellbeing in the context of domestic and family violence.

1.2. Background

In [March](#), [April](#) and [June](#) 2020, Women's Safety NSW published three reports detailing the overall impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

Women's Safety NSW also released a series of reports detailing the specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on select groups of women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, as well as particular issues including:

- [Experiences of Indigenous Women Impacted by Violence During COVID-19](#)
- [Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant and Refugee Women and Children Experiencing DFV](#)
- [Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence – Current Case Studies During COVID-19](#);
- [Experiences of Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence During COVID-19](#);
- [Family Violence and Alcohol During COVID-19](#); and
- [Child Contact, Shared Care and Family Law in the Context of DFV and COVID-19](#).

Currently, almost two months have passed since the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in NSW, however many victims of domestic and family violence continue to remain at home with their abusers and the economic and financial impacts of COVID-19 are

increasingly being felt, raising further concerns about a potential worsening of violence and abuse and ongoing barriers in accessing services and support.

1.3. Methodology

To gain an understanding of the continued impacts of COVID-19 on domestic and family violence victims-survivors and frontline workers since the lifting of restrictions in NSW, Women's Safety NSW conducted an online survey with domestic and family violence specialists right across NSW. The survey was completed between the dates of the 24th of August 2020 and the 2nd of September 2020, by a diverse range of **53** frontline specialists from 34 services covering each geographical centre of NSW. This includes each of the 27 Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCASs) which collectively supported over 51,000 women last year experiencing domestic and family violence, mostly following a police incident, as well as two women's refuges, two women's health centres, two staying home leaving violence services, and a women's counselling and case management service, as well as 16 respondents from women's specialist services who chose not to identify their service.

Survey participants were located in Inner Metropolitan (15%), Outer Metropolitan (30%), Regional (49%) and Rural/Remote (8%) locations. The participants included women's domestic and family violence specialists in a variety of roles including; managers, assistant managers, support workers, domestic and family violence specialists, intake and referral officers, case workers, program managers, executive officers, safety action meeting coordinators and family advocacy support service workers. The survey asked for feedback and opinions on the continuing impacts of COVID-19 on domestic and family violence.

2. Key Findings: The Continuing Impacts of COVID-19 on Domestic and Family Violence

The following represents the key survey findings:

- **45%** stated that their client numbers have continued to rise since COVID restrictions began to lift and when compared to this time last year.
- **80%** have noticed an increase in the percentage of higher risk cases since the lifting of COVID restrictions, identifying the worsening economic and financial impacts of COVID as a key factor.
- **86%** have noticed an increase in the complexity of client needs since the lifting of COVID restrictions, also due to the economic and financial impacts of COVID.
- **73%** have noticed an escalation in violence and abuse triggered by drug and alcohol abuse.
- **69%** have noticed an escalation in violence and abuse triggered by unemployment and financial pressures.
- **71%** stated that a key service gap for their clients is access to ongoing affordable accommodation.
- **63%** stated that a key service issue for their clients is inconsistent police responses.
- **51%** stated that their service needs more resources so that women experiencing violence and abuse, who have complex needs, can have access to specialist support.
- **98%** believed that victims of domestic violence should be able to call police using a 'silent solution' by simply pressing the number '55' after dialing '000', so the perpetrator doesn't know they made the call.

3. Rise in Number and Complexity of Cases.

The following sections outline the key findings from the Women's Safety NSW survey with frontline domestic and family violence specialists, providing a unique insight into the current presentations of domestic and family violence within the evolving COVID-19 context.

3.1. Increasing number of clients.

Overall, frontline domestic and family violence specialists are reporting client numbers as continuing to rise as the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis begins to be felt with greater force. Of those surveyed, **45% stated that their client numbers have continued to rise since COVID restrictions began to lift and when compared to this time last year.** The full range of results is as follows:

- **45%** stated that their client numbers have continued to rise since COVID restrictions began to lift and when compared to this time last year.
- **29%** stated that their client numbers are higher than this time last year but have stayed steady since the COVID restrictions began to lift.
- **22%** stated that their client numbers are the same as this time last year.
- **4%** stated that their client numbers have dropped when compared to this time last year.

“At the start of the pandemic it was not too dissimilar to usual but as time went on more women began reaching out for support especially those with domestic and family violence” - Celeste, Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS*

However, it is not just a numbers game, the economic and financial ramifications of COVID have continued to affect the severity of women's experience of violence and abuse. Of those surveyed, **80% indicated that despite the easing of COVID restrictions, the proportion of women categorised as 'higher risk cases' has increased.** This is a significant increase when compared to the survey conducted by Women's Safety NSW in June 2020, where **47.6%** of respondents reported that they had observed an increase in the percentage of high-risk cases since COVID-19 restrictions began to lift.

“We are seeing at least a 75% increase in referrals having an ADVO application

and our SAM [Safety Action Meeting] referrals [for serious threat matters] have tripled.” - Laura, Regional Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCAS*

“Anecdotally (there) appears to be an increase in choking matters. More financial stress for a lot of women with partners losing work and clients having difficulty accessing support from external services due to offenders being around more” - Lorraine, Inner Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCAS*

“Women are stuck. If they lack financial independence, how will they rent? Where will they go?” - Natalie, Regional Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, Women’s Health*

3.2. Increasing Complexity of Client Needs

The ever-increasing complexity of clients' cases continues to see those on the frontline call for changes to our system within its individual response service components, and in relation to the coordination between the constituent bodies. **An overwhelming 86% of respondents indicated that they have seen an increase in the complexity of client needs** since the lifting of COVID restrictions and as the economic and financial impacts of COVID have worsened. These figures are slightly higher than a similar survey conducted by Women’s Safety NSW in April 2020, in which **75%** of surveyed frontline workers and service providers reported that the complexity of client needs was increasing.

Particularly in light of the decreased accessibility to social and support groups and services as a result of COVID restrictions, those at the forefront are having to step in and fill the gap—acting in service capacities which were not previously within their core line of work. Charlotte*, an Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCAS stated that there is *“Definitely an increase in complexity. Our caseworkers are all at capacity.”*

Lorraine*, an Inner Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCAS expanded on this:

“Matters are more complex with additional factors such as financial stress and lack of external support being reasons for victims to not action ending relationships at this time. Clients are not able to access a lot of services face to

face due to agencies having restrictions and as such more women are not able to link in with services.”

An additional aspect of this increasing complexity is the physical limitation being placed on women as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, particularly when they are attempting to seek help. These physical limits include:

- Lack of available time and space to speak to service providers when the perpetrator is home all the time;
- Being unable to leave vulnerable family members who need complex care; and
- Being restricted in their ability to physically visit support centres.

Participants further elaborated on these points in their responses:

“One client I spoke with could not speak longer on the phone as the other party was at home. Arranging an appropriate time to ring back was difficult as she stated that he was at home all the time due to COVID19.” Jean*, Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS

“Sometimes we are the only contact people have. Families are interstate and they cannot get to them. Services are under strain by the amount of extra calls. Women are unable to leave the home as easily if they have care commitments with vulnerable family members.” - Amy, Regional Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS

Further, as the pandemic has unfolded within NSW, there has been an increase in the use of drugs and alcohol as people attempt to cope with unprecedented change. This has affected the domestic and family violence sector as well and was identified by respondents as an additional element to the complexity of cases:

“One client has been in a verbally/emotionally/controlling abusive relationship for many years. The perpetrator recently lost his job and is self-medicating with alcohol and ICE resulting in increased aggression and escalation into physical abuse. I have had many such cases in recent months.” - Skylar*, Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS

4. The Relationship Between Domestic and Family Violence and the Economic Impacts of COVID-19

4.1 Economic impacts on clients.

As the economy slows and unemployment rates rise, family and domestic violence is 'acting like an opportunistic infection, flourishing in the conditions created by the pandemic'.¹ With many people without jobs or working from home, COVID-19 has fostered the perfect environment for social isolation; one of the most prominent tactics used by abusers to distance victims from their support network.² In addition, the financial pressures and stress caused by the pandemic can increase the frequency and severity of domestic violence.³ Adding to this mix, we have seen an increase in drug and alcohol consumption during the pandemic, further heightening risk in some cases.⁴ It is well established that factors such as financial stress, unemployment and drug and alcohol misuse are not the key drivers of violence against women.⁵ However, they can lead to a triggering or an escalation of this violence and abuse.⁶ This is what is being observed by frontline domestic and family violence specialists supporting women during this time:

"A client in long term abusive relationship formerly had respite during work hours, but now husband [is] home all the time. He has become even more controlling and limits her ability to leave the house. Financial pressures cause him [or rather, serve as a trigger for him] to go into a rage at minor things (eg, child leaving light on when leaving room). He is drinking steadily and increasingly limiting her access to

¹ Amalesh Sharma and Sourav Bikash Borah, 'Covid-19 and Domestic Violence: an Indirect Path to Social and Economic Crisis' (2020) *Journal of Family Violence*.

² Ibid.

³ James Atta Peprah and Isaac Koomson, *Violence and Society: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (Information Science Reference, 2014).

⁴ Australian National University, 'Alcohol consumption increases during COVID-19 crisis', *Australian National University* (Web Page, 10 June 2020) <<https://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/alcohol-consumption-increases-during-covid-19-crisis>>.

⁵ See, for example, Patrick Noonan, Annabel Taylor and Jackie Burke, "Links between alcohol consumption and domestic and sexual violence against women: Key findings and future directions" (2017)

ANROWS Compass 08/2017 <https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/19024408/Alcohol_Consumption_Report_Compass-FINAL.pdf?>.

⁶ Ibid.

*finances or financial information, stating that now he is at home he will do it all. He has started monitoring all bills and the shopping docketts from the supermarkets and demanding detailed explanations of what she buys and why. He checks her phone and wants to know who she speaks to and when. This was all part of the abuse prior to the **COVID-19 restrictions but has increased in intensity and frequency. She is scared physically and emotionally for herself and the children**". - Ava*, Regional/Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS*

*"[A] woman with **5 children in the early days of lock down could not take the abuse anymore.***

[A] family member had phoned us.... and helped her to come to us." - Celeste, Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, Women's Health and WDVCS*

As both case studies reveal, it is not solely the woman experiencing violence, but also the children living in the home. With limited access to childcare support throughout the pandemic (discussed at [6.3](#)), being forced to witness and endure abuse significantly affects a child's mental, emotional and physical health.

In the survey, members were asked what issues they are seeing for clients relating to COVID-19 as the economy slows, with increasing unemployment and financial pressure. The results are as follows:

- **73%** Escalating violence and abuse triggered by drug and alcohol abuse
- **69%** Escalating violence and abuse triggered by unemployment, financial pressures etc.
- **67%** Reduced ability by women to escape violence and abuse due to unemployment, increasing financial dependence and insecurity
- **62%** Reduced ability by women to escape violence and abuse due to lack of affordable housing and accommodation supports
- **62%** Women reporting that it is harder to engage with services and processes at this time (such as court processes)
- **62%** More women reporting violence and abuse for the first time
- **54%** Women still finding it hard to engage with services safely, including where working from home with the abuser present
- **44%** Perpetrators using COVID as an excuse or a tool/weapon to exert further control over their victim(s)
- **43%** Women prioritising material needs and concerns (of themselves, their

children and their extended families and communities) over their own safety at this time

A highlighted issue is women's inability to escape a violent relationship due to lack of affordable housing and accommodation support. Prior to COVID, this issue was already a significant issue affecting women's ability to access safety in the context of domestic and family violence, yet with the economic impacts associated with the pandemic, the issue has been further exacerbated. Victims who have lost their income have a limited ability to leave an abusive relationship.⁷ This is heightened by the fact that there is currently an increasing demand for crisis accommodation.⁸ Therefore, women find themselves stuck in a revolving door between remaining with their abuser or risking the reality of homelessness (often with children in tow).

"28 days of accommodation is a joke for women trying to flee DV and find safety, and it's even worse for women who are homeless due to historic DV + complex histories. It's appalling that women are left to sleep in their cars because they don't 'have any more TA [temporary accommodation]'. Why not? Disgraceful." - Ava*, Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS

"Older women who are so at risk of homelessness now. Housing for all women is at crisis point. There are [also] huge waiting times for appropriate counselling." - Natalie* Regional Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, Women's Health

4.2 The economic impact on services

As identified above, throughout the easing of restrictions frontline workers have continued to experience increases in both client numbers and the complexity of client needs. It is of crucial importance that services are adequately funded and resourced to manage the rising demand for assistance and increasing complexity of client needs. However, despite the critical role that frontline services play in keeping women and children safe, it is clear that they are currently not adequately resourced. **31%** of respondents indicated that their service is not sufficiently resourced to fulfil their

⁷ Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, Submission 97 to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *Homelessness in Australia*, 12 June 2020, p.10.

⁸ Ibid.

current role, the remaining results are as follows:

- **31%** stated that their service **does not have sufficient resources** to fulfil their current role nor to ensure women experiencing violence have access to the specialist supports they need (to meet complex needs)
- **51%** stated that their service does have sufficient resources to fulfil their current role. However, **they need more resources** so that women experiencing violence and abuse can have access to the specialist supports they need (to meet complex needs)
- **10%** stated that their service **does have sufficient resources** to ensure women experiencing violence and abuse have access to the specialist supports they need (to meet complex needs)

4.3 The current gaps in services

As restrictions were lifted and victims/survivors had greater opportunity to report violence, seek assistance and flee abusive living situations it is clear that the service gaps experienced by clients became more apparent. Frontline services have continued to report that the current system is unable to provide the support needed to increasingly vulnerable women and children who have experienced violence during COVID. **They identified several key service gaps impeding the protection of women and children at the current time:**

- Access to ongoing accommodation **(71%)**
- Inconsistent police responses **(63%)**
- Access to temporary accommodation **(58%)**
- Access to support/case management to support clients in their complex needs **(58%)**
- Access to income and material support **(54%)**
- Inconsistent court outcomes **(50%)**
- The ability to call police safely and silently (i.e. without the abuser knowing) **(42%)**
- Access to safe at home support (e.g. Staying Home Leaving Violence) **(38%)**
- Access to culturally specific community supports (for particular women e.g. Aboriginal, CALD, women with disabilities, older women, younger women and LGBTIQ+) **(31%)**
- Access to free legal services, for example to assist with cross applications or child recovery where there are child safety concerns **(29%)**

- Access to information in language (for immigrant and refugee women) (**17%**)

Access to ongoing accommodation was the most significant service gap, with **71%** of respondents identifying critical need in this area. Access to accommodation had consistently been identified as a key service gap by frontline specialists in March, April, May and June 2020. However, in June 2020 **54.8%** those surveyed identified it as a service gap, meaning that concerns regarding access to ongoing accommodation have risen considerably as restrictions continued to ease and the economic impacts of COVID-19 worsened. Ongoing accommodation must be available for victims to have a genuine option to escape the violence. If such accommodation was attainable, victim-survivors wouldn't have to decide to remain in or return to a violent relationship because of the lack of access to appropriate accommodation.

Concerns regarding inconsistent police responses was identified by **63%** of frontline specialists. It is of critical importance that police responses are consistent as a positive response from police not only increases the safety of women and children, it also has the potential to significantly increase reporting rates and ensure access to justice for women and children. Key concerns in relation to policing at this time concern specialist domestic violence police resourcing being redeployed for COVID-related duties, and poor responses from frontline general duties officers who have undertaken limited domestic and family violence training.

These results are consistent with the feedback that has been provided by frontline workers and services since the outbreak of the pandemic. In particular, **access to ongoing accommodation, access to support/casework to assist clients with complex needs, and access to income and material needs have been consistently identified** in the top four key service gaps by frontline workers surveyed in March, April, May and June 2020. Concerns regarding **inconsistent police responses** have increased over time throughout the pandemic, being the fourth and sixth most commonly identified gap/issue in March and April respectively, and the most commonly identified service gap/issue in June 2020 when it was identified by 59.5% of survey respondents as such (compared with 63% of respondents in August 2020).

5 Impacts of COVID-19 on 'At Risk' Groups

5.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women

With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as the most high-risk group experiencing domestic and family violence, it comes as no surprise that the impacts of COVID-19 have disproportionately affected these women and their children. These sentiments were echoed by our members, with 44% of them identifying an increase in client numbers since the beginning of COVID-19.

Toni*, an Aboriginal Domestic and Family Violence Specialist who was surveyed, shared that she has also noticed *“that our Elders are becoming a target from their family members”*. The most urgent needs identified by our members for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children experiencing violence at this time were access to specialist Indigenous domestic and family violence case management support and access to ongoing accommodation.

In addition to COVID-19's impact on the rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children and the lack of face-to-face services available, the pandemic has also greatly affected the communal aspect of Indigenous life, disrupting the connection with culture and with mob. As Jacinta*, an Aboriginal Domestic and Family Violence Specialist states: *“For Aboriginal people it is about connecting with our families and our mob, when we do not have the most important element in our life that we are accustomed to everyday it plays a huge loss to our day to day life and is in how we function.”* Taylor* related this disruption to not having a *“safe place to go”* in the occurrence violence. This disconnect can be even more challenging for young people who require support from their peers when feeling unsafe in their home.

For further information on the experiences of domestic and family violence of Indigenous women during COVID-19, please see Women's Safety NSW's recent [report](#) on the topic.

5.2 Women on Temporary Visas

Whilst women on temporary visas do not make up a large proportion of women experiencing domestic and family violence in Australia, they are a particularly vulnerable group. This vulnerability stems from the lack of access and eligibility many

of them have to government services, such as income support payments, crisis accommodation, social and community housing and Medicare, as a result of their visa status. The vulnerability of many women on temporary visas was and continues to be exacerbated by COVID-19. With travel restrictions still being in place, this group of women are prevented from returning to their home countries, and indeed they may have children in their care preventing them from returning home, and self-isolation measures can mean they are forced to remain home with their abuser.

The majority of respondents identified the following issues as '**extremely serious**' for women on temporary visas who experience domestic and family violence. These issues are presented in order of severity as identified by respondents and will be further expanded upon below:

- Lack of access to housing and accommodation support: **82%**
- Lack of access to income support (Centrelink): **78%**
- Lack of access to Medicare: **75%**
- Lack of access to Legal Aid: **65%**
- Lack of access to trauma informed telephone interpreter services: **63%**
- Lack of access to multicultural specialist domestic and family violence case worker support: **61%**
- Lack of access to childcare: **61%**
- Lack of access to working rights: **60%**

5.2.1 Lack of Access to Housing Support and Accommodation Support

Women on temporary visas escaping domestic and family violence are currently faced with significant barriers in accessing safe housing. Eligibility to access supported accommodation, such as a women's refuge, is often based on an individual's receipt of a government income support payment, and social and community housing requires individuals to meet the Australian Residence Rules as an Australian citizen or permanent resident. Housing support provides women with immediate safety from an abusive relationship. However, given the current requirements, women on temporary visas are often left without access to the housing support necessary to escape domestic and family violence.

All frontline workers surveyed believed that this lack of access to housing and accommodation support was either an '**extremely serious**' (**82%**) or '**very serious**' (**18%**) issue that hinders women on temporary visas who are

experiencing violence ability to seek safety.

Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, women on temporary visas have become increasingly reliant on their abuser for their income. Coupled with the fact that these women have structural vulnerabilities as described above, this dependability makes it increasingly difficult to escape: *“These Women have the added **complex needs that take more time in support and often have even less access to what they need**”* - Celeste*, Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS & Women’s Health.

5.2.2 Lack of Access to Social Welfare Services (Centrelink and Medicare)

Human services including Centrelink and Medicare are essential for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence, both when they are attempting to flee the violence, and in their ongoing recovery process. However, many temporary visa holders are not eligible for social welfare services, including Centrelink income support payments and Medicare services.

The lack of access to income support (Centrelink) was identified by **all respondents** as either an **‘extremely serious’ (78%)** or **‘very serious’ (22%)** issue that impeded on the safety of women on temporary visas who are experiencing domestic and family violence. Having no access to financial support leaves many women on temporary visas dependent on, and thus more vulnerable to, their violent partners.

Similarly, the lack of access to Medicare was also identified as an issue for women on temporary visas who are currently seeking safety. The **vast majority (96%)** of those surveyed believed that this issue was either **‘extremely serious’** or **‘very serious’** for women on temporary visas. Many women from CALD backgrounds, including women on temporary visas feel safer in disclosing the abuse that they are experiencing to health professionals rather than to the police. Access to health support is therefore not only essential for the physical and mental health needs of women on temporary visas experiencing violence, but it is also a critical service for them to communicate the abuse that they are experiencing.

Social welfare services exist to support the vulnerable, but presently, through failing to provide assistance to many women on temporary visas who are experiencing domestic and family violence, they are not meeting this objective.

5.2.3 Lack of Access to Child Care

Access to childcare can be critical for women on temporary visas. Women on temporary visas who have children that require care and are unable to afford or access that care, can risk losing their employment and therefore becoming more dependent on their abusers to meet their daily needs such as accommodation and food. Especially, as they often do not have a significant support system of family and friends within the country, or access to accommodation support or income support payments. The provision of childcare services not only allows women on temporary visas to continue any existing employment, but also to potentially seek employment which can provide them with the necessary financial means to become independent from the abuser.

In addition, child care services can potentially provide a temporary safe space for child-victims of domestic and family violence away from the perpetrator, and a means for women to seek support away from the family home with the perpetrator, including to link up with the social and legal supports they need to achieve safety for themselves and their children. The **vast majority (90%)** of those surveyed believed that access to childcare was either '**extremely serious**' or '**very serious**' for women on temporary visas.

5.2.4 Lack of Access to Work Rights

Temporary visa holders often have restrictions to their working rights within Australia. For example, student visa holders are ordinarily restricted to working only up to 40 hours per fortnight.⁹ Although this restriction was temporarily relaxed from 7 March 2020 for student visa holders working in supermarkets, it was reinstated from 1 May 2020.

Similarly, from 18 March 2020, the restriction was temporarily relaxed for student visa holders working in certain aged care providers, and from 23 April 2020, the restriction was also temporarily relaxed for student visa holders working in health

⁹ Australian Government, 'Check visa details and conditions', *Department of Home Affairs* (Web Page, 26 February 2020) <<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/already-have-a-visa/check-visa-details-and-conditions/see-your-visa-conditions#>>>.

care or undertaking health care related courses.¹⁰ While these particular relaxed restrictions have not yet been reinstated, there is ongoing concern for when they do become reinstated.

As mentioned above, work for women on temporary visas is extremely important as a means to gain financial independence from their abuser. When work rights are restricted, women are therefore less likely to earn enough to gain financial independence from their abuser. The **majority (86%)** of respondents identified a lack of access to work rights as either an **'extremely serious'** or **'very serious'** issue affecting women on temporary visas experiencing violence and seeking safety during the COVID-19 pandemic situation at present.

5.2.5 Lack of Access to Legal Aid

Legal Aid is essential for women experiencing domestic and family violence, and more so for women on temporary visas experiencing violence. Women on temporary visas can be subjected to specific and unique forms of violence related to their visa status when abusers make threats of deportation and/or separation from their children.¹¹

For example, there is a requirement for temporary partner visa holders to hold the visa for a period of two years before the potential grant of a permanent partner visa. In this time period, women are required to live with their partner in a continuing, genuine and committed relationship.¹² However, during the course of this time period, a violent partner may make threats in order to control the victim in an ongoing cycle of fear. Although there are options to leave the violent relationship while remaining in Australia, some women may be unaware of this as

¹⁰ Australian Government, 'Temporary relaxation of working hours for student visa holders', *Department of Home Affairs* (Web Page, 21 August 2020) <<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/student-500/temporary-relaxation-of-working-hours-for-student-visa-holders>>.

¹¹ Madeline Hislop, 'Women on temporary visas are more vulnerable than ever', *Women's Agenda* (Web Page, 20 April 2020) <<https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/women-on-temporary-visas-experiencing-dv-are-more-vulnerable-than-ever/>>.

¹² Australian Government, 'Subclass 820 Partner visa (temporary)', *Department of Home Affairs* (Web Page, 25 August 2020) <<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/partner-onshore/temporary-820>>.

a result of a lack of legal knowledge or lack of English skills.¹³

The provision of legal aid is therefore important for women on temporary visas to understand their rights to access justice, safety and wellbeing, as well as to be supported throughout the potentially intimidating legal and court processes.¹⁴ The **majority (90%)** of respondents identified access to legal aid as either an **'extremely serious'** or **'very serious'** issue for women on temporary visas.

5.2.6 Lack of Access to Multicultural Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Case Worker Support

A number of women on temporary visas come from multicultural backgrounds where English is not their first language. Women who come from such culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds face specific issues in terms of navigating the unfamiliar and complex service systems while escaping violence. For such women, Multicultural Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Case Worker support can ensure they have a consistent and reliable point of contact, which is built on trust through cultural awareness, and can facilitate women's safe disclosure of their domestic and family violence experience and allow services to assist them.¹⁵ The **majority (83%)** of those surveyed identified the lack of access to Multicultural Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Case Worker support as an **'extremely serious'** or **'very serious'** issue for women on temporary visas.

5.2.7 Lack of Access to Trauma Informed Telephone Interpreter Services

The **majority (88%)** of those surveyed identified this lack of trauma-informed telephone interpreter services as an **'extremely serious'** or **'very serious'** issue for women on temporary visas. Many women on temporary visas come from a non-English speaking background (NESB). When women from a NESB do not have

¹³ Australian Government, 'Family violence and your visa', *Department of Home Affairs* (Web Page, 17 March 2020) <<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/partner-onshore/family-violence-and-your-visa>>.

¹⁴ Legal Aid NSW, 'Family violence and visas', *Legal Aid NSW* (Web Page) <<https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/publications/factsheets-and-resources/family-violence-and-visas>>.

¹⁵ Hayley Foster et al, *Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant and Refugee Women Experiencing Domestic and Family Violence* (Report, 31 July 2020) <https://www.womenssafety.nsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/31.07.20_Impact-of-COVID-on-Migrant-and-Refugee-women-experiencing-DFV_FINAL.pdf>.

access to a trauma-informed telephone interpreter when seeking safety, they can be placed at even greater risk and further re-traumatised.¹⁶ In a recent sector-wide survey undertaken by Women's Safety NSW, just 10% reported telephone interpreter services to be extremely accessible for their clients, 74% reported that they were “not very” or “not at all” trauma informed, 57% indicated that their clients had been pressured not to use interpreters, and 86% reported experiences of police using family members, friends, community or even children or the abuser to translate for their clients who were victims of domestic and family violence.¹⁷ The devastating result of a lack of access to trauma informed telephone interpreter services is that women may lose trust in the service system designed to help her, and may not have further opportunity to safely disclose their experience of violence. Consequently, many fall back into the vicious cycle of fear, control and violence at the hands of their perpetrator.¹⁸

5.3 Migrant and refugee women more generally

Research on the experiences and prevalence of violence against migrant and refugee women is limited, however what is known is that cultural, language and systemic barriers serve to reduce access to safety and support for this group of women. In addition, women from this group are at a higher risk of homicide¹⁹. A survey conducted by our members identifies specific issues facing culturally and linguistically diverse women experiencing violence, these challenges are:

- **84%** reported barriers in accessing justice (police, courts, child protection)
- **84%** reported a lack of access to professional, trauma informed interpreter services
- **72%** reported a lack of access to immediate income and material support
- **70%** reported barriers accessing support services
- **67%** reported barriers to accessing information

¹⁶ Hayley Foster et al, *Interpreter Services in Domestic and Family Violence Matters* (Report, 16 July 2020) <https://www.womenssafetynewsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/EMBARGOED_Interpreter-Services-in-the-Context-of-DFV_FINAL-REPORT_WSNSW_16-JULY-2020.pdf>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jarni Blakkarly, 'Calls for specialist domestic violence interpreters to support at-risk migrant women', *SBS News* (Web Page, 17 July 2020) <<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/calls-for-specialist-domestic-violence-interpreters-to-support-at-risk-migrant-women>>.

¹⁹ Boxall et al. above n 26.

A report released by the Muslim Women Australia Association on the impacts of COVID-19 on migrant and refugee women highlights the increased pressures experienced by families that has resulted in higher rates of violence. Reduced income added stress of children at home and uncertainty of the future has compounded the impact of violence on these women. In addition, restricted access to extended family due to social distancing and confusion around information and messaging in language has further implicated migrant and refugee women seeking help from violence during the pandemic ²⁰. Migrant and refugee women are a particularly vulnerable group as they are often separated from their family unit and communities that act as vital support networks. COVID-19 further exacerbates the isolation of these women who have limited access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services to accommodate their needs.

5.4 Women with disability

Women with disability are vulnerable to higher rates of both physical and sexual abuse from those closest to them and from strangers, when compared to other women.²¹ As women with disability can often be highly dependent on others to meet their needs, it can be difficult for women to access support. Women with disability face multiple barriers when attempting to access support, particularly when violence is being perpetrated by someone who has a caring role. A survey of domestic violence specialist conducted by Women's Safety in July 2020, identified the issues commonly facing women with disability are:

- Barriers accessing support services **(73%)**
- Lack of access to ongoing support/case management **(68%)**
- Barriers in accessing justice **(68%)**
- Housing and homelessness **(55%)**
- Lack of access to immediate income and material support **(52%)**

²⁰ Muslim Women Australia, *Muslim Women Australia: Responding to COVID-19, An Interim Review of the On the Ground Experiences of CALD Communities in the Initial Phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, (2020) <<https://mwa.org.au/latest-articles/muslim-women-australia-responding-to-covid-19/>>.

²¹ ANROWS, *What does it take? Developing informed and effective tertiary responses to violence and abuse of women and girls with disabilities in Australia: State of knowledge paper*, (July 2015) <https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/19024813/3_3.4-Landscapes-Disability-1.pdf>.

Given the nature of the pandemic, women with disability are further disadvantaged by isolation restrictions that increase their dependency on others, who may be the perpetrator.

5.5 Women living in rural and remote areas

Rates of domestic and family violence are notably higher in regional, rural and remote areas than metropolitan areas.²² In 2019, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that **people living in remote and very remote Australia are 24 times more likely to be hospitalised due to domestic and family violence than people living in major cities.**²³ These statistics have climbed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with women living in these areas having the added barrier of limited emergency housing options available to them.²⁴

Additionally, lower socioeconomic status associated with living in rural and remote areas is worsened by the financial impacts of COVID-19.²⁵ As previously discussed, economic distress is linked with increased frequency and severity of domestic violence in some cases. Further, stronger stereotyped construction of gender roles and expectations in rural and remote settings can also lead to a normalisation and condoning of male use of violence and abuse as a reaction to financial stress and strain.²⁶

There needs to be an investment in pilot and metropolitan-centric domestic and family violence service systems to ensure victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in regional, rural and remote areas have access to the critical supports that they need to be safe.

²² Moncia Campo and Sarah Tayton, *Domestic and Family Violence in Regional, Rural and Remote Communities*, (A report on the overview of key issues, 8 December 2015), p.1.

²³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story*, (Report, 17 May 2019), p.101.

²⁴ Above n 5

²⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Rural and Remote Health*, (Web Report, 22 October 2019), p.2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

5.6 Older Women

Emerging data reveals a substantial increase in the number of older women who are victims of domestic violence.²⁷ As Cara* a Regional Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS commented, *"We have had an increase in elderly victims [during this time]"*.

This is due to an increased vulnerability amongst older women, and a heightened reliability on a 'trusted other' (family member, caregiver), creating a significant power imbalance and exposing older women up to a range of physical, emotional, psychological and financial abuse.²⁸

Self-isolation measures further intensify the isolation from support-networks many older women experiencing violence have suffered, creating a perfect environment for abuse to take place.²⁹ In addition, due to a reported increased level of surveillance and control in abusive home environments, contacting help-services or talking freely with these can be severely compromised.³⁰

*"We have situations where the older person has been forced to live in one room and have their food in one room. They are not allowed out of their room [and if they do], are pushed back into the shed [where they're forced to live]"*³¹ - Jenny Blakey, Board Member and Chair of Advisory Group at Elder Abuse Action Australia (EAAA) and Manager of Seniors Rights Victoria

There is a growing awareness of the need to place older women focused domestic and family violence specialists within domestic and family violence specialist services. These specialists can act as a conduit between age care service systems and the domestic and family violence system more broadly and can ensure a specialist responses cognisant of the particular risks, needs and interests of older women experiencing domestic and family violence. There is also a heightened awareness of

²⁷ Liz Alderslade, 'Elder abuse likely on the rise during COVID-19', *Aged Care Guide*, (Website, June 2020), <<https://www.agedcareguide.com.au/talking-aged-care/elder-abuse-likely-on-the-rise-during-covid-19>>.

²⁸ Duke Han and Laura Mosqueda, 'Elder Abuse in the COVID-19 Era' (2020), 68(7), *European Journal of Environment and Public Health*, 1386, p.1386.

²⁹ Above n 27

³⁰ Above n 28

³¹ Ibid.

the particular need for the development of more affordable accommodation for this cohort.

5.7 Younger women

Violence against younger women is more prevalent in women aged between 18-34, who are **more likely to have recently experienced intimate partner violence than women over 35**³². As younger women are less likely to have accumulated education or work experience, they can often be dependent on others, of whom may be their perpetrator. Younger women and children are most likely to seek specialist homelessness services as a result of domestic and family violence³³. This is of particular concern during the pandemic, as these services are overrun by increased demand. In a recent survey of domestic and family violence specialist conducted in July 2020, the most commonly identified issues currently facing young women were:

- Housing and homelessness **(80%)**
- Lack of access to ongoing support and case management **(72%)**
- Lack of access to immediate income and material support **(68%)**
- Lack of access to ongoing income, childcare, affordable accommodation and material support **(64%)**
- Barriers to accessing justice **(61%)**
- Barriers to accessing support services **(61%)**

It is critical that young people experiencing domestic and family violence have access to targeted specialist support to assist them in achieving safety and to recover from the violence experienced. This support should be integrated with the support for their non-offending parent or caregiver wherever possible and appropriate.

³² Politoff, V., Crabbe, M., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Powell, A., Stubbs, J., Ward, A., & Webster, K., (2019). Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality: Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) (ANROWS Insights, Issue 01/2019). Sydney: ANROWS, <<https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/05051743/2017NCAS-Youth-SubReport.pdf>>.

³³ AIHW, above n 93.

5.8 LGBTIQ People

People from the LGBTIQ+ community experience similar risk to people in the general population of domestic and family violence. **One in three LGBTIQ+ people have experienced violence from a partner or ex-partner in a past or present relationship**³⁴. A major barrier for women from the LGBTIQ+ community is that service providers lack general knowledge on LGBTIQ+ peoples' needs and overall acceptance that people from this community experience violence despite not being in a heterosexual relationship. As LGBTIQ+ people are a non-homogenous and diverse group, services often do not meet their specific needs³⁵. In normal circumstances, service providers report low intake from this community despite the high prevalence of violence experienced. This is particularly alarming in the context of the pandemic, as people from the LGBTIQ+ are further restricted and isolated.

LGBTIQ+ people experiencing domestic and family violence also need specialist domestic and family violence supports to assist them in achieving safety and to recover from the violence experienced. Presently, however, such supports are limited, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas.

³⁴ Aids Council of NSW (“ACON”), *Domestic and Family Violence* (Website), Accessed July 2020, <<https://www.acon.org.au/what-we-are-here-for/domestic-family-violence/#domestic-family-violence>>.

³⁵ ANROWS, *Developing LGBTQ programs for perpetrators and victims/survivors of domestic and family violence* (2020), (Research to policy and practice, 10/2020), ANROWS, Sydney, <https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/11093206/ANROWS_RtPP_Bear-LGBTIQ.pdf>.

6 The Need for Urgent Government Action

6.1 The Silent Solution - Enabling Police to Respond to Silent Calls for Assistance

In the United Kingdom, mobile calls to 999 (the official emergency number) that are silent are diverted to the police's 'Silent Solution' system - a system to filter out accidental or hoax emergency calls, but also to help people who are unable to speak. Through this system, callers hear an automated police message that asks them to press 55 to be transferred to their local police force. Once connected, the police call handler will attempt to communicate with the caller by asking simple yes or no questions. A national 'Make Yourself Heard' campaign in 2019 aimed to raise awareness of the Silent Solution system for victims of domestic and family violence. In the UK, around 50 calls per day are transferred to local police forces as a result of someone pressing 55 when prompted, allowing police to urgently respond.³⁶

An **overwhelming majority (98%)** of those surveyed agreed that NSW should implement a system similar to the UK whereby victims of domestic violence use a 'silent solution' by simply pressing the number '55' after dialing '000', so the perpetrator doesn't know that they made the call.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women and children have become even more reliant upon police for their safety, and we recognise that police forces are performing a crucial role at a difficult time and have been balancing competing demands during this period. **By implementing a system to respond to silent calls there is the potential to save lives** and allow for police to respond to those callers who cannot speak.

This is particularly important for victims who share the same living space as their abusers. There is a concerning lack of privacy for victims/survivors as abusers may be constantly monitoring their actions. Victims/survivors who are found to be "retaliating" against their abusers may face devastating consequences.

³⁶ Independent Office for Police Conduct, 'National campaign to raise awareness of the Silent Solution system', *Independent Office for Police Conduct* (Web Page, 8 April 2019) <<https://policeconduct.gov.uk/news/national-campaign-raise-awareness-silent-solution-system>>.

6.2 Continuing Need for JobKeeper and JobSeeker

As this paper discusses, COVID-19 has had a significant economic impact on victims of domestic violence. The JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments, however, have played a crucial role in mitigating this impact. By preventing economic distress which in turn prevents the escalation of violence, and by providing women with the financial means of escaping a violent relationship, the JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments have been successful in curbing the rates of domestic violence throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Money to leave and support yourself and/or your children has always been a huge factor to consider for women not just in the current circumstances” - Penelope*, Inner Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS

“On recent presentations, financial hardship has resulted in escalating violence by perpetrators” - Skylar*, Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS

The importance of these payments is evident through our members’ responses when asked how important it is for women’s safety for the government to maintain the JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments. Their answers were as follows:

- **78%** Extremely important
- **14%** Very important
- **6%** Moderately important
- **2%** Not very important
- **0%** Not at all important

However, despite the effectiveness of these payments in the domestic and family violence context, the government is narrowing JobKeeper and will halve the JobSeeker supplement to just \$250 a fortnight at the end of September.³⁷ Concerningly, the Australian government first removed JobKeeper payments from female-dominated childcare, whilst at the same time offering the male-dominated construction industry

³⁷ Cathy Humphreys, ‘Poverty is trapping women in abusive relationships’, *Pro Bono Australia* (Web Page, 26 August 2020) <<https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2020/08/poverty-is-trapping-women-in-abusive-relationships/>>.

and “tradies” subsidies like the HomeBuilder package.³⁸ These actions only exacerbate already worsening gender inequities felt from the economic impacts of COVID, all of which further increase risk for women at risk of and experiencing domestic and family violence, and their children.

6.3 Free or Highly Subsidised Child Care

With the Australian government’s free childcare scheme ending on 12 July 2020, those who have lost income or employment will be worse-off when the subsidy system restarts.³⁹ Those who will be particularly affected by this are victims of domestic violence, especially children.

Free childcare provided families experiencing domestic violence with the ability to remove their children from the violence unfolding at home. The **vast majority of those surveyed believed that it was either ‘extremely’ (63%) or ‘very’ (22%) important for women’s safety in the context of domestic and family violence right now that the government re-establish free or highly subsidised childcare.**

“[Childcare services are a] safe place for women to be without their partners to seek further support with additional safety for vulnerable children to escape exposure to violence”. - Skylar*, Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS

“(The) more support (that) the women has access to can potentially assist with the pressure in the home” - Melanie*, Inner Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist,, FASS

“We have had referrals from day care centers as the only place the women speaks to someone else” - Isabella*, Inner Metropolitan, Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, Referral Families

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Sarah Pilcher and Kate Noble, ‘Increasing the childcare subsidy will help struggling families - and the economy’, *The Conversation* (Web Page, 17 July 2020) <<https://theconversation.com/increasing-the-childcare-subsidy-will-help-struggling-families-and-the-economy-142557>>.

“During this difficult time, with restrictions in place this allows children to be in a ‘safer’ place without financial burden” - Hayley, Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS*

6.4 Women-Focused Economic Stimulus Packages

The Government has taken steps to provide targeted economic stimulus and support packages to women experiencing domestic and family violence during COVID. However, the timely translation of these policies and packages into real, definitive action has been less than satisfactory. With Australia's global position in relation to the gender pay gap,⁴⁰ and economic empowerment and political engagement deteriorating,⁴¹ it is unsurprising that survey participants have called out for the government's economic stimulus package to include a focus on female jobs and industries. Further, the cutting of funding and subsidisation of wages for those within the 'overwhelmingly female' childcare industry, whilst simultaneously 'pump[ing]' further stimulus into male-dominated industries like construction, is becoming a point of controversy. Such efforts are causing some to say recent government action is 'striding back towards normalcy' and reflecting 'old sexist biases'.⁴² Others have noted that COVID has highlighted 'how important women's work really is...they've kept us alive and kept our society running'.⁴³ In order to recover together as a society, we must ensure women are not left behind.

All participants surveyed considered it to be important for women's safety in the context of domestic and family violence right now for the government's economic stimulus package to include a focus on female jobs and industries; with 62% describing it as 'Extremely Important'; 30% 'Very Important' and 8% 'Moderately Important'.

⁴⁰ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020* (Report, 2019).

⁴¹ Sushi Das, 'Fact check: Has equality for Australian women relative to the world fallen in the last six to eight years?', *ABC News* (Blog, 13 August 2018) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-13/fact-check-global-gender-gap/10051632>>.

⁴² Damien Cave, 'A stimulus backlash delivers a global warning: Value female workers', *The New York Times* (Blog, 14 June 2020) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/14/world/australia/coronavirus-stimulus-childcare-women.html>>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

6.5 Time to Invest in Social and Affordable Housing

Participants particularly stressed the importance of government initiatives in relation to social and affordable housing at this time, with **86%** indicating that such action was 'Extremely Important' and the remainder describing it as 'Very Important'.

Ava* an Outer Metropolitan/Regional Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS described such action as being *"vital"*. While, Melanie* an Inner Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, FASS noted that crisis accommodation was, pre-COVID: *"very difficult... I can't imagine how much more difficult during COVID"*.

Indeed Skylar* an Outer Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS further expanded on this saying: *"The ability to provide affordable housing for victims cannot be stressed anymore... [it is one of the] biggest barrier[s] to women and children leaving unsafe homes."*

It is crystal clear that if we want to break down one of the 'biggest barriers' to women and children's safety in this country, we need to invest in social and affordable housing. This should form a critical component of governments' COVID economic recovery plans.

6.6 The Need for Regulation of Alcohol Consumption

Of those surveyed, **90%** considered the need for further regulation of alcohol supplies to residential homes, particularly those which are high-volume and occur late at night, as being important. Indeed **48%** of respondents classified this as an 'Extremely Important' need.

Whilst it must be noted that alcohol abuse is not a characteristic of every domestic and family violence incident, indeed one respondent noted that they speak to *"many women where alcohol and drug use isn't a factor at all"* - alcohol and other substance misuse are considered 'well-known domestic abuse risk factors'.⁴⁴ Isolation paired with psychological stressors and increases in negative coping mechanisms has been described as the 'perfect storm' to trigger an 'unprecedented wave of family violence'.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Kim Usher et al, 'Family violence and COVID-19: Increased vulnerability and reduced options for support' (2020) 29(4) *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 549.

⁴⁵ Ibid 550.

Indeed despite social restrictions being set in place, and gatherings of large groups of people - birthdays and other celebrations being suspended, we have seen alcohol sales rise more than 36%.⁴⁶ Thus, people are drinking more and arguably most importantly, they are drinking at home. Undoubtedly, increased alcohol consumption is going to play a part in unsafe domestic climates that women are being subjected to within the current COVID climate.

“Alcohol helps fuel many DV incidents. Police told me during the lockdown there wasn't much DV because the pub/clubs were shut. It's pretty much common sense that home delivery of alcohol is going to add to the violence too.” - Penelope*, Inner Metropolitan Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, WDVCS

Further regulation of high volume, late night, rapid delivery of alcohol delivery to residential areas would aid in mitigating further escalation of already volatile situations in domestic settings in a proportion of cases. For further information on domestic and family violence and alcohol consumption during COVID-19, please see Women's Safety NSW's [report](#) on the issue in collaboration with Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education.

6.7 The Need to Invest in Support for Victims and Abusers No Matter Where They Live

Presently, an adult or child victim or abuser's access to safety and support for domestic and family violence depends upon their geographical location, or a range of other factors, such as their language, disability, culture, visa status and so forth. Most of the specialist domestic and family violence programs and services are funded in the metropolitan areas or in a few select pilot locations. In order to expand access to these services, so they are universally accessible, we need to invest in their expansion.

Presently, domestic and family violence is estimated to cost the Australian economy over [21.7 billion per annum, \\$6 billion of which is directly shouldered by the Federal Government](#). Yet the [Federal Government invests just under \\$110 million per annum on direct measures to address it](#). This year, in response to COVID, this amount has been [temporarily increased by \\$150 mil](#).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Women's Safety NSW join the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) in calling on the Federal Government to increase its investment in addressing domestic and family violence, including ensuring everyone has the safety and support they need, by committing \$1 billion per annum to the implementation of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Plan. We will only achieve a substantial reduction in rates of violence against women in this country if we invest in the evidence-based solutions to addressing it.

7. Concluding Remarks

Women, children and families at risk of, and experiencing domestic and family violence, have been placed under heightened risk as a result of COVID-19 social isolation measures and it is critical that their safety remains a priority for all Australian governments as recovery measures are implemented. These latest state-wide survey results from frontline domestic and family violence specialists offer an insight not only into issues and challenges that women and children continue to face but also those faced by frontline workers. These challenges ultimately prevent women, children and families from accessing the support they need to achieve lasting safety.

Women's Safety NSW and our members look forward to working with the NSW and Commonwealth Governments and non-government partners to address these support gaps to ensure women, children and families have access to the services they need for their safety.

8. Recommendations

8.1 'Silent Solution' Implementation

Women's Safety NSW recommends that a similar system to the UK's 'Silent Solution' be implemented in Australia to allow victims of domestic and family violence to be able to silently call police without altering their abuser.

8.2 Continuation of JobSeeker and JobKeeper Payments

Women's Safety NSW recommends the continuation of JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments for those experiencing domestic and family violence. Additionally, Women's Safety NSW recommends implementing a reporting mechanism that would allow women to notify services when the perpetrator has access to their payments and if they are controlling their account.

8.3 Increase in Subsidised Child Care

Women's Safety NSW recommends the re-installment of free or highly subsidised childcare and that those experiencing domestic and family violence be immediately added as eligible candidates for free childcare. *Currently, to be eligible for the childcare subsidy, you must be a: grandparent, transitioning into work or experiencing temporary financial hardship.*

8.4 Women-Focused Economic Stimulus Package

Women's Safety NSW recommends that the government include a focus on female jobs and industries in their stimulus and economic recovery package.

8.5 Women-Focused Economic Stimulus Package

Women's Safety NSW recommends that the government stimulus and economic recovery package include a package for social and affordable housing development.

8.6 Regulation of Rapid, Late Night, High Volume Alcohol Delivery

Women's Safety NSW recommends the regulation of high-volume, late night, rapid delivery of alcohol supply to residential homes.

6.8 The Need to Invest in Support for Victims and Abusers No Matter Where They Live

Women's Safety NSW recommends the Federal Government increase its investment in addressing domestic and family violence to \$1 billion per annum for the implementation of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Plan.

8.7 Specific Recommendations for Supporting Women on Temporary Visas

- a) Women's Safety NSW recommends as a matter of urgency, the Federal Government introduce a new sub-class of temporary visa for people on another temporary visa experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence so that they may have access to essential government services, including Centrelink, Medicare, Housing, Legal Aid, Child Care and work rights whilst they are seeking safety and resolving their domestic and family violence and migration matters.
- b) Women's Safety NSW recommends increased investment in trauma-informed telephone interpreter services to ensure women experiencing violence from non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESBs) can be heard and understood when seeking access to safety and support.
- c) Women's Safety NSW recommends increased investment in multicultural domestic and family violence case worker specialist support to ensure women from migrant and refugee backgrounds and their children have access to culturally safe and accessible services and support regardless of geographical location.

8.8 Specific Recommendations for Priority Populations Groups, Including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women, Migrant and Refugee Women, Women with Disability, Older Women, Younger Women and LGBTIQ+ Peoples

Women's Safety NSW recommends increased investment in priority-focused domestic and family violence case worker specialist supports to ensure victims of domestic and family violence from higher risk population groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women, Migrant and Refugee Women, Women with Disability, Older Women, Younger Women and LGBTIQ+ peoples, and their children have access to culturally safe and accessible services and support regardless of geographical location.

8.9 Specific Recommendations for Supporting Women Living in Rural and Remote Areas

Women's Safety NSW recommends increased investment in pilot and metropolitan-centric domestic and family violence service systems to ensure victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in regional, rural and remote areas have access to the critical supports that they need to be safe.

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