

To the Inquiry: The Delivery of National Outcome 4 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children.

I am very concerned that Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia has withdrawn from the contract with the Government operated 1800RESPECT service due to their serious ethical concerns. Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia have demonstrated their commitment to quality counselling services.

This service should be providing high quality evidence based client centred trauma counselling, the people of Australia have a right to expect nothing less. Rape & Domestic Violence Services has an evidence-based and best practice counselling manual. The first edition was prepared over a two-year period and included national and international reviews of evidence in relation to sexual assault domestic and family violence trauma, consultation with Australian practitioners, and stakeholder reviews. The two subsequent reviews of the manual were completed over two 12-month periods in 2009 and 2014. Clinical supervision is currently provided by Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia in house by qualified supervisors for all of our counsellors. It is of considerable concern that any downgrading and outsourcing of this practice, which is critical to quality service provision, might considerably reduce the current excellence in the service provided. Medibank Health Solutions have not made clear the evidence base of their service in part and are also openly offering subpar services.

The open tendering of services has brought in providers where profit is the primary motive. Medibank Health Solutions have stated their aim is to make a profit. This is unacceptable in the provision of a service intended to provide justice and rehabilitation to the most vulnerable in our society. The profit to our community and our nation if we can properly treat and prevent violence is incalculable.

Systems advocacy will also cease under Medibank Health Solutions. This loss of systems advocacy is a considerable concern. NGOs have many roles and responsibilities, one being to represent the voices of those made vulnerable by their circumstances in the democratic process. If NGO voices are silenced through privatisation or contracts that 'gag' systems advocacy, the only voice that will be heard will be those of the powerful. Such an imbalance will undermine many of the values we know are critical to a thriving democracy such as human rights, social justice, equity and a reduction in violence against women to name but a few.

I'm also concerned that the 70 dedicated Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia workers who are being made redundant as a

consequence of this organisation withdrawing from the 1800RESPECT service will not receive their redundancy entitlements. Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia may have to close down if the Government does not fund these payments. I support the Government taking responsibility for funding for these redundancy payments, as they have done in the past.

Yours Sincerely

Paula Martin