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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the role of Coordinator-General for Family Safety was established in the ACT to provide strategic leadership and drive whole-of-government collaboration and coordination for the ACT response to domestic and family violence (DFV). The Coordinator-General also works across government and with the community to develop new policy, services and approaches that address emerging problems and strengthen our capability to address DFV.

The ACT Government submission to the Commonwealth Government House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence aims to share the work of the ACT Government in addressing DFV, and to share some of the insights gained as we progress our reform agenda in this space.

RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

a) Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality.

The Office of the Coordinator General for Family Safety was established to provide strategic leadership, coordination, policy analysis and innovation expertise to drive cultural change and system reform, and to build whole-of-government and whole-of-community capability to address DFV.

This work includes:

- creating and fostering relationships and collaboration between government, non-government and business sectors to improve how DFV and support services and systems are delivered;
- bringing the right people together to help find and test new responses to address DFV (via the Family Safety Hub);
- providing strategic policy analysis and advice on DFV (Family Safety Policy team);
- overseeing the development, coordination, implementation and reporting of government responses to DFV-related recommendations, strategies, inquiries and plans; and
- driving cultural and attitudinal change in relation to DFV.

Along with establishing the role of Coordinator-General, the ACT Government made an historic funding commitment of \$21.42 million over four years under the 2016 *ACT Government Response to Family Violence*¹ to address DFV and provide additional supports to families, women and children dealing with the psychological, physical, emotional and financial costs. This funding increased to \$24 million over four years in the 2019-20 budget for a refreshed Safer Families package.

The ACT actively advocates for DFV reform at a national level and continues to work with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to deliver the Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

¹ http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/883484/ACT-Government-Response_family_violence.pdf

ACT DFV Crisis Response

Domestic Violence Crisis Service

The Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) is the ACT's specialist and primary DFV crisis service. DVCS provides 24 hour a day crisis intervention, legal advocacy, risk assessment, safety planning and case management supports for people that have been affected by, and those that use violence in their relationships. DVCS provides crisis responses to the community via:

- a 24-hour crisis line;
- face to face crisis intervention;
- attendance at incidents of violence with ACT Policing;
- responding to referrals from hospitals, other agencies and self-referred clients;
- providing practical assistance; and
- providing clients with access to emergency accommodation and placement into specialist DFV refuges and a suite of programs for adults, children and young people.

ACT Policing and Victims of Crime

ACT Policing's Family Violence Coordination Unit and Victims of Crime team work with Government agencies and non-government organisations to ensure a collaborative approach in combating family violence and providing ongoing support to victims. Within this unit, Victim Liaison Officers and Family Violence Order Liaison Officers provide dedicated and essential support to those affected by crime, including family violence. The Family Violence Order Liaison Officer is a specialised role within the Family Violence Coordination Unit that serves to provide a connection between the policing response to family violence and the application for court issued Family Violence Orders. The function is designed to address the issue of victim safety and provide improved support to victims of family violence. LGBTIQ victims of DFV can also seek support from the ACT Policing LGBTIQ Liaison Officer.

Family Violence Order Liaison Officers directly engage with family violence victims in cases of identified risk and provide direct assistance in the application for a Family Violence Order. Police officers also engage with parties seeking a Family Violence Order unrelated to a police response, and assess incidents for criminality, risk, and provide assistance as required. Additionally, all Family Violence reports received by Police and subsequently attended by ACT Policing are reviewed by the Family Violence Coordination Unit. This provides a high-level review of investigations and ensures ACT Policing employ best-practice initiatives in combating family violence. Victims are not ordinarily involved in this review, as doing so may unnecessarily re-traumatise those affected by family violence.

Where there is a criminal offence before the courts, the needs of victims of DFV in the ACT are considered and discussed via weekly case-tracking meetings with multiple agencies through the Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP). The FVIP provides an interagency response that includes ACT Policing, Child and Youth Protective Services, Victims Support, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Corrective Services and DVCS.

Next steps – common risk assessment framework and an integrated model

The ACT Government (in partnership with key stakeholders) is developing a draft Common Risk Assessment and Management Framework to assist all ACT services to identify DFV risk, intervene earlier and improve access to support and information. The Framework is currently being developed and tested in different pilot sites which will inform finalisation of the Framework. The intended outcome of this work is to assist all ACT services to consistently and effectively identify DFV risk with the aim of earlier intervention and improved access to support and information.

There is also work underway to progress an integrated model for addressing DFV in the ACT. This project aims to identify opportunities for change across the end to end DFV system – from prevention and early intervention to post-recovery for survivors, as well as what measures we put in place for people using violence. Through discovery and co-design with stakeholders and service users, we will identify several action pilots that will occur in a staggered way across the second half of the year and beyond. This includes trialling a new case tracking and risk assessment model for the Family Violence Intervention Program that has already been developed.

This work is currently being undertaken with a Joint design team across the Office of the Coordinator General for Family Safety and the ACT Victims of Crime Commissioner/Victim Support ACT agency. An Expert Reference Panel and a Lived Experience Reference Group will also be established to provide input into this work.

ACT prevention and early intervention work

While there is often a focus on the crisis response to DFV, the ACT is committed to working in the prevention and early intervention space in order to stop the violence before it starts by ensuring both victims and perpetrators of DFV get the help they need when they need it.

The ACT remains committed to addressing gender inequality as one of the driving causes of DFV. The ACT Government supports the work of OurWatch in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. The ACT Government also funds a range of women's services and organisations to provide women with targeted support and to improve the wellbeing and status of all ACT women via contracts and grants programs.

Key ACT projects in the DFV prevention and early intervention space include:

The Family Safety Hub

The Family Safety Hub uses a human-centred approach to co-design and co-produce new ideas that can provide better support, earlier, for those affected by DFV. New programs, supports and services are designed and delivered through an innovation process. Small scale pilots are test and evaluate new ideas to assess their scalability.

The Family Safety Hub has gathered research insights from service providers, the community and people who have lived experience of DFV that directly inform the work that we do.

The Family Safety Hub aims to design and deliver solutions that can:

- create new or improved pathways to safety that better meet the needs of the community;
- promote integration and cohesion across the system;
- build capability across the system; and
- foster shared understanding of DFV and its impacts.

Children and Young People

We know that children and young people exposed to DFV have unique needs and can be affected differently than the adults around them. Services and supports do not meet the needs of young people because they have never been asked what they need. Consulting with children and young people was one of the key recommendations the Domestic Violence Prevention Council presented to government after its Extraordinary Meeting in 2018.

The Family Safety Hub, in partnership with the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner, has listened directly to children and young people talk about their experiences of DFV. The project was led by young people at all stages. Youth 'sounding boards' helped shape the methodology of the project. An adult reference group with expertise in ethical research, domestic and family violence, child protection and young people's participation also guided the project.

Seventy young people aged 13 to 20 shared their views or personal stories of living with DFV during in-depth interviews and small group discussions. They told us about how adults control their world and make assumptions that aren't right, how important their relationships are with their siblings and how the trauma of DFV does not stop when the violence does.

What we heard has been distilled into thirteen insights, which are a powerful reflection of just how difficult it is for young people to be heard, to be respected and to find a pathway to safety that suits their individual needs.

The Family Safety Hub has begun sharing the insights with people across government and the service sector. Hearing these messages will enable the ACT Government, the service sector and the community to improve support and services for children and young people affected by DFV.

In 2020-21, the Family Safety Hub will lead a co-design process to find ways to provide the supports and services that young people need. Co-design will include young people as well as government, non-government and community sector representatives. The insights have identified the key issues facing young people who are affected by DFV and the co-design will design and test solutions to address these problems.

ACT Government Domestic and Family Violence Training Strategy

The ACT has committed \$2.476 million over four years to continue the delivery of DFV training to all 21,000 ACT Government staff. This training will equip staff with the skills they need to recognise and respond to clients and colleagues experiencing DFV. From June 2019 to March 2020, over 1,400 staff participated in the Foundation level eLearn, and over 580 participated in the Foundation Manager face to face training.

The suite of training modules and delivery methods meet the diverse needs of all the professionals and business units across government, including ACT Policing. With the assistance of a whole of government community of practice and our community partners, we are proud to have developed and to be delivering such high quality and targeted training, from our online foundation training, through to the face-to-face intensive and manager training modules.

The whole of government training strategy includes foundation training for all public service employees and specific training for managers. We will deliver more intensive training for ACT Government staff in frontline roles from 2019-20, complementing the specialist training already delivered to Child and Youth Protective Services case workers and frontline police officers. The ACT Government has also established an ACT Public Service community of practice to share best practice and a consistent approach to implementing the training strategy. An evaluation framework and panel of specialist training providers will ensure that we continue to improve and deliver training that meets best practice standards and evidence.

Domestic and Family Violence Death Review

Understanding the circumstances leading up to a death resulting from DFV is vital for preventing the likelihood of similar deaths occurring in the future. The Office of the Coordinator General for Family Safety is leading the development of an ACT Domestic and Family Violence Death Review mechanism to be established in the ACT.

Having this death review mechanism will allow for more robust data collection and informed public awareness campaigns.

A consultation process with key stakeholders is currently being undertaken with a view to introduce legislation to implement a Death Review scheme in 2020-21. The intended outcome is to make system-wide improvements across policy, systems and services, data collection and legislation to prevent deaths related to DFV. Risk factors identified as part of the Death Review will also inform concurrent work of the ACT Government to deliver a DFV Risk Assessment and Management Framework.

After the violence has ended

The ACT recognises that people still need support for a considerable period of time after the violence has ended or after a person has left a violent relationship. Victim Support ACT provides case coordination for DFV victims, including access to specialist trauma counselling services and a range of advice and assistance that includes safety planning, support to navigate government services, court support and linking the victim to other appropriate community-based supports. Victims Support ACT also administers financial assistance to eligible DFV victims.

The DVCS Staying@Home program provides specialist DFV case management support to women in the ACT with complex, post-crisis needs. This service offering has allowed DVCS to address the gap that previously existed in supporting women in our jurisdiction after they leave a violent relationship. It is funded by the Department of Social Services via Keeping Women Safe in their Homes and Local Support Coordinator funding.

Since its inception in mid-2016, Staying@Home has provided support to over 100 women and has worked to address the need for women to have choice about where they will go when leaving a violent relationship. It supports them to remain in their own home safely; which is essential given the alternative of an overwhelmed refuge/public housing pathway. Many Staying@Home clients have been able to maintain their private and public tenancies without the need to move at all. Others have been supported to access/relocate within the public housing system without the need to access the crisis accommodation sector or refuges first. In addition to case management, Staying@Home staff undertake security assessments on clients' homes, with a view to assisting women with a range of security improvement measures if these are needed.

Staying@Home has become an integral part of the ACT DFV service system. Without it, these women would likely be living in circumstances that are unsafe and unsustainable. Many would be facing homelessness, and in the face of this may have returned to violence. The ACT would support ongoing funding for this program by the Commonwealth Government.

b) Best practice and lessons learnt from international experience, ranging from prevention to early intervention and response, that could be considered in an Australian context.

The ACT Government notes the findings of Putt et al (2017)² who carried out a multi-site examination of specialist DFV services (including DVCS) and their provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing DFV. This study highlighted the importance of:

- access to primary crisis support services;
- practical support across emergency and transitional accommodation; food and transportation;
- help with supporting children;
- information that can be discussed one-to-one;
- respect demonstrated in language, interaction and inclusion;
- flexibility and responsiveness to individual and family needs;
- progressive demonstrations of culturally safe environments and practices;
- sustained and respectful relationships with well-trained workers that reach out into communities;
- services that are networked with other human, financial, justice and housing services and are authoritative within services;
- longer-term and outreach interactions;
- strong and sympathetic women in communities acting as access and referral points;
- services working through a trauma lens coupled with emotional and educative support and;
- capacity and responsiveness to respond to tailor legal protections.

The review also considered evidence derived from victim/survivors from outside Australia. It examined six studies particularly relevant to the question of 'effective' responses to women that had experienced DFV. Overall, these studies showed that:

- independent one-on-one work with specialist DFV advocates generated better outcomes;
- localised service design relevant to the populations was important;
- hotline services, counselling and advocacy all deliver important information to DFV victims, and victims increase self-efficacy, coping and enhanced decision making;
- survivors identify empathy, empowerment, individualised care and ethical boundaries as important to them from services;
- independent, proactive and victim-centred outreach had a more positive impact in enabling women's help-seeking and engagement with justice agencies, than system-based assistance; and
- a longitudinal study of women leaving violent relationships identified the importance of sustained specialist support and a 'basket of resources' as providing 'foundation stones' towards safer lives.

Both Australian and international studies point to the importance of robust, stable, and independent specialist DFV services that are funded for a number of programs designed for practicality and direct assistance that provided sustained care for clients, even after the violence had ended.

c) The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments,

² Putt, J., Holder, R., & O'Leary, C. (2017). *Women's specialist domestic and family violence services: Their responses and practices with and for Aboriginal women: Final Report* (ANROWS Horizons 01/2017)

local governments, non-government and community organisations, and business.

Three major reports on DFV in the ACT were released in 2016 and provided a broad picture of the impact of DFV in the ACT and the barriers to improving crisis responses and prevention and early intervention. These reports were:

- *Report of the Inquiry: Review into the system level responses to family violence in the ACT*³ by Laurie Glanfield;
- *Review of Domestic and Family Violence Deaths in the ACT*⁴ from the Domestic Violence Prevention Council; and
- *Domestic Violence Service System Gap Analysis Project Final Report*⁵ (March 2016) prepared by the Community Services Directorate.

The *ACT Government Response to Family Violence* addressed the findings of all three reports and is the guiding document for the ACT's policy approaches and responses to DFV. There were consistent themes across each report that have shaped the reform agenda in the ACT. One consistent theme was a need for improved coordination of government and non-government services in the ACT.

Several projects are already contributing to better coordination of services in the ACT. Development of the Common Risk Assessment and Management Framework and the FVIP pilot (as described in our response to ToR a) will improve government and sector coordination with the aim of earlier intervention and improved access to support and information and a shared understanding of DFV amongst service providers.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of the Coordinator General for Family Safety is coordinating regular round table meetings of the DFV sector which provide a local mechanism for quickly identifying and prioritising sector wide issues. This roundtable is also important for facilitating planning, coordination and responses, and improving both access to policy and contributing to its development.

Members of the round table have shared with our team that they now have a better understanding of and access to ACT and Commonwealth Government policy responses to DFV. The ACT Government is now looking to formalise these meetings on a more permanent basis to improve coordination across the sector.

d) The way that health, housing, access to services including legal services, and women's economic independence impact on the ability of women to escape domestic violence.

Health

Access to legal services during pregnancy is important as we know that one in five women whose partners use violence will experience that violence during pregnancy. When support services are provided early and in a coordinated way, it can significantly improve the legal and health outcomes for those affected by DFV.

³ http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/883484/ACT-Government-Response_family_violence.pdf

⁴ http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/864714/DVPC-Review-of-Domestic-and-Family-Violence-Deaths.pdf

⁵ http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0009/864711/ACT-Domestic-Violence-Service-System-Final-Gap-Analysis-Report.DOCX

For these reasons, the Family Safety Hub's first pilot program is the Health Justice Partnership, which provides free and confidential legal advice in health and community care settings, particularly to vulnerable women who have multiple legal issues. This legal advice can be accessed easily and has the potential to prevent a problem reaching the point of crisis. The program reaches vulnerable women who have multiple legal issues and so are receiving support and advice they would otherwise not be able to access.

There are currently three Health Justice Partnerships in the ACT; two are located in the maternity wards of hospitals and one is located at a Child and Family Centre. These partnerships provide legal, non-legal and wrap-around coordinated care for people in our community who are experiencing the most vulnerability. Together, healthcare and legal professionals are helping prevent a crisis such as homelessness, physical injury or psychological harm for women and their children. The partnerships have also greatly improved the ability of staff to identify the warning signs of DFV and provide the trusted support women need. Since January 2019, 392 women have sought assistance via the Health Justice Partnership.

In addition to the Health Justice Partnership, Safer Families funding has supported the ACT Health Directorate to develop a suite of tools to assess and build capacity among specialist alcohol and other drug sector workers and organisations. These tools enable specialist services to benchmark their practice and identify strategies to extend capability working with DFV victims, which will extend to working with perpetrators as the project progresses. The tools also provide clinical and practical guidance to alcohol and drug services on how to prevent and respond to DFV.

The Forensic Medical Unit in Canberra Health Services, with support from ACT Policing, also led a training initiative to build stronger awareness and understanding of the impacts and risks of non-fatal strangulation for frontline officers across health, emergency services, police, corrections and child protection.

Housing

DFV is the leading cause of homelessness in Australia, and concerns about economic independence and housing weigh heavily on women when deciding to leave a violent relationship. Investing in housing programs and other options (such as the DVCS Room4Change Program) that allow and support women and children to remain in their homes safely makes perpetrators accountable for their behaviour while keeping women and children safe.

DVCS report that most women subjected to violence in the ACT remain in their homes post-crisis. In 2014 alone, a total of 1053 women subjected to violence were assisted by DVCS, with only eight of those women entering a refuge post-crisis. The large numbers of women in the ACT remaining at home post-crisis is, in part, a result of the effectiveness of exclusion orders, first introduced in 1986, and the integrated responses of the Family Violence Intervention Program established in 1982. The other contributor to this scenario has been the rise in homelessness which has meant less opportunity for women to leave the family home.

The most significant and consistent finding by DVCS is that up to 55 per cent of the homeowners and 62.5 per cent of the families living in private rentals lose their homes within twelve months of separating from their violent partner. The following contributing factors are identified as interacting in various ways to raise the probability of women staying at home post DFV becoming homeless:

- many of the women seeking support display symptoms consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder;
- more than three-quarters of the women experience parenting problems, difficulty at work, feelings of being overwhelmed; financial hardship and had involvement with child protection services; more than half have experienced ongoing risk to safety, are involved in Family Law Court proceedings, have difficulty maintaining study commitments and have ongoing involvement in matters with the Criminal Justice System; and
- reporting of extensive property damage, social isolation, minimal skills for independent living, substance abuse, feelings of 'exhaustion' and 'frustration' and difficulty accessing childcare, transport and specialist medical treatment.

Since 2016, the DVCS Staying@Home Program (as described in the response to ToR b) has provided support to over 100 women and has worked to address the need for women to have choice about where they will go when leaving a violent relationship. The ACT Government also funds the Safer Families Grants program, where people who are seeking to establish or re-establish a home following the experience of DFV can access up to \$2000.

In the ACT and across Australia, the demand for DFV crisis accommodation far outstrips supply. This is in part caused by a lack of long-term housing options for women and children post-crisis, resulting in longer periods of occupancy in refuges and creating a backlog in the crisis accommodation system. An increased and sustained investment in affordable long-term housing options for people escaping violence is essential to addressing this problem and will increase the overall safety and wellbeing of women and children as they rebuild their lives.

Economic independence

The Family Safety Hub brought together representatives from financial, legal, crisis and housing services who generated ideas to prevent these crises occurring. Following this workshop, the Family Safety Hub has begun work on a response to the hidden issue of financial abuse, which is often not easily recognised by those who are experiencing it, or by the services that support them. The Family Safety Hub is currently testing a program with Care Financial Counselling and our community and support workers to provide the information and tools they need to recognise and respond to financial abuse

Access to legal and other services

DVCS' Court Advocacy Program assists those that are subjected to DFV by supporting them to:

- Apply for Family Violence Orders (FVOs);
- Access legal advice;
- Develop Victim Impact Statements;
- Give evidence in court;
- Be kept informed and updated about their domestic and family violence matters as they proceed through the courts; and
- Engage with other agencies such as the courts, ACT Policing and Child, Youth and Protection Services.

For a number of years DVCS has had a working relationship with the ACT Magistrates Courts, Department of Public Prosecutions and Legal Aid in the criminal and civil protection order jurisdictions. There is co-location of DVCS staff at the courts, professional information sharing, and applicants can be supported from practitioners from both the legal and social work disciplines.

e) All forms of violence against women, including, but not limited to, coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse.

The ACT recognises all forms of DFV, including the full range of coercive and controlling behaviours. The ACT Family Violence Act 2016 recognises that, “family violence extends beyond physical violence and may involve the exploitation of power imbalances and patterns of abuse over many years”.

The definition of family violence according to the Family Violence Act includes both physical and sexual violence or abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, economic abuse, and threatening behaviour. It also includes coercion or other behaviour that controls or dominates the family member and causes the family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of the family member or another person. In addition, any behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness or otherwise be exposed to this behaviour or the effects of the behaviour is also considered family violence under law.

The ACT Government DFV Training Strategy includes detailed definitions and examples of the full range of coercive and controlling behaviours that constitute DFV. Including these definitions and examples in the foundation training ensures that all ACT public service employees have a shared understanding of the full range of coercive controlling behaviours.

In the ACT, victims of technology-facilitated abuse can seek assistance from DVCS as part of their safety planning. DVCS and the ACT DFV sector continuously engages in training with a specific focus on technology-facilitated abuse. This training must be updated regularly as the nature of technology-facilitated abuse changes rapidly. This training gives practitioners the skills to protect victims against technology-facilitated abuse as well as the skills required to collect technological information that can be used as evidence in court.

f) The adequacy of the qualitative and quantitative evidence base around the prevalence of domestic and family violence and how to overcome limitations in the collection of nationally consistent and timely qualitative and quantitative data including, but not limited to, court, police, hospitalisation and housing.

The ACT Government supports improved qualitative and quantitative data collection around the prevalence of DFV. An ACT Information and Data Sharing Taskforce has recently been established to improve information and data sharing arrangements to deliver better outcomes and improve service delivery by building a stronger understanding of the needs and expectations of clients who have multiple touch points with government services.

This whole-of-government reform agenda has the potential to provide the whole-of-government data and information sharing ICT and authorising capability to achieve the outcomes recommended in *the ACT Domestic and Family Violence Data Collection Project Report*. The Data Analytic Centre within the ACT Government Office of the Chief Digital Officer is currently investigating the feasibility of developing a ‘data lake’ capability that could assist with data sharing and data linkage for DFV. Data requests made by the Commonwealth during the COVID-19 pandemic have indicated that there continue to be issues with DFV data collection and coordination across and within jurisdictions in Australia. The ACT Government advocates for improved data collection and coordination at a national level to ensure that Commonwealth funding can be more strategically directed to areas of highest need.

An example of effective coordination across jurisdictions is the National Minimum Dataset set out by the National Death Review Network. The National Minimum Dataset ensures that each death review function collects data that is comparable and provides a unique ability to report and make recommendations based on national data in relation to DFV deaths. Once established, the ACT Domestic and Family Violence Death Review will collect data that will contribute to the National Minimum Dataset via the National Death Review network.

The ACT will continue to contribute to the development and implementation of the enhanced Performance Monitoring and Reporting Framework currently under development for the Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*.

g) The efficacy of perpetrator intervention programs and support services for men to help them change their behaviour.

Perpetrator Interventions

The ACT Government is committed to improving responses to and programs for perpetrators of DFV. In August 2019, the Coordinator General for Family Safety and the Victims of Crime Commissioner hosted a forum and a workshop focused on better equipping participants with foundation knowledge and skills to effectively and safely engage with clients who use DFV. The forum included national expert presenters and brought together stakeholders across government and the community, with a focus on how the sector can improve safety by working together to identify and address violent behaviour.

Information from the workshop and forum will inform future work on addressing perpetrators using a system-wide in the ACT.

The key areas of focus will be:

- ensuring accountability across all parts of the system;
- determining which interventions might be most appropriate for the ACT; and
- ensuring correct identification of the primary aggressor and how to best measure the effectiveness of perpetrator interventions.

The next steps for the ACT Government include:

- exploring the adoption of minimum standards and accreditation for perpetrator interventions;
- establishing a mechanism to enhance collective practice in the perpetrator space;
- exploring opportunities for the delivery of early interventions for first time offenders; and
- include a section on working with perpetrators in the ACT Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework.

DVCS Room4Change Program

The ACT government funds DVCS to deliver Room4Change, a program that engages men to improve the safety of women and children and create opportunities for all family members to have space for action. Room4Change engages with men who use violence over a nine to twelve-month period, with engagement length varying dependent on the man's engagement and support needs. Crucial to this engagement process is that the risk and safety considerations for the women and children impacted by the participant are also part of this engagement.

Room4Change provides a unique opportunity to change behaviour for men in the ACT who seek assistance in creating respectful and safe relationships, in a safe way that supports the rights of women and children to be safe within their own homes and families. While current service models rely heavily on refuge and transitional housing models for accommodation for women and children escaping violence, there are situations where it is more appropriate for the man to be removed from the family home, allowing his family to maintain some form of normalcy in their lives so that the children can continue to attend the same school, and remain within any current support networks that they may have.

The Room4Change program has four main components; this includes group work, one-on-one case management, partner support and a residential component. Room4Change has been designed to reflect current optimal standards set out in the New South Wales 'Towards Safe Families' practice guide.

Group Work

The components of group work for participants include group readiness sessions, a 20-week narrative and invitation based men's behaviour change group and a 17 week 'Caring Dads' group with a focus on the impact of violence, abuse and neglect on children.

Case Management

In addition to the group work, Room4Change practitioners provide one-on-one case management sessions that focus on the participant's journey through the program. The case work component is crucial to the program as it allows an opportunity to address and give space to the participant's own experiences of trauma, which might include his own upbringing or other co-occurring wellbeing issues such as alcohol and/or other drug use.

Partner Support

Partner support is the cornerstone of the wrap-around safety involved in doing this work. Without contact with the people most impacted by a participant's use of violence and abuse, it is impossible to determine if change has occurred or to manage risk. This work may, from the outside, present as if the focus is on men. However, this work needs to be focused on the safety of women and children. When that focus is lost, we run the risk of colluding with the person using violence and we lose the opportunity to effect real change. Within Room4Change partner support is offered to all current partners of the men in the program as well as any ex-partners with whom he may have had children. Often partner support is also extended to other family members such as the man's parents if they have also been impacted by his use of violence.

Residential Accommodation

The fourth unique element of the Room4Change program is the optional residential accommodation component. Having accommodation as a part of a men's behaviour change program is a relatively rare occurrence, with only a handful of programs nationally utilising this model. Not all the men who take part in Room4Change will be accommodated by the program, however, for some men this option has provided several benefits.

The primary purpose of the accommodation is to assist and enhance the safety of those impacted by the man's use of violence. Due to this, behaviour change is the key focus of the engagement, and the accommodation is utilised as a safety tool. As this concept is relatively new in the men's behaviour change

space, it is hoped that the two-year external evaluation of Room4Change that is currently taking place will add to the literature base in terms of men's behaviour change intervention models.

Room4Change currently has the capacity to house twelve men in five detached houses. Four of these are co-located in one complex, with an office and group room space on site. This configuration allows the men to engage with Room4Change practitioners as needed, but also helps to facilitate attendance at group and one-on-one sessions. To date, the accommodation has been used in a number of ways, and flexibility of use has become paramount to the program's success. Many of the men who stay at the Room4Change accommodation have been excluded from the family home through a Family Violence Order or through Parole conditions. Ordinarily it would not be uncommon for the person impacted by the violence to leave the family home. While in some circumstances this will still be required to maximise safety, in some situations it may be appropriate for the man using violence to leave the home.

Often when men are excluded from the family home there is a risk of them also stopping or reducing any maintenance costs that they may be contributing to the family (such as mortgage and rental repayments) in an effort to continue exerting power and control. In some situations, it can also be financially stressful or untenable for the man to pay current maintenance costs whilst simultaneously paying rent for himself away from the family home. It is not uncommon for men moving into the Room4Change accommodation to have previously been 'couch surfing', staying in share houses, or accessing other homelessness support services in Canberra that house single men.

The Room4Change accommodation aids in providing the man with safe, stable and affordable accommodation that enables engagement with the program and assists in facilitating him to maintain maintenance payments as needed. The one-on-one case management sessions can be utilised to support the transition of men out of the accommodation, with the aim of supporting men to access private rental or public housing rather than re-entering the homelessness sector.

In practice, due to the length of the Room4Change program, men often enter and exit the accommodation as needed. Whilst some men may not have other options, there are a number of men who voluntarily utilise the accommodation as a part of their de-escalation strategy, or as a way of creating space for their partner. Feedback from participants' partners suggests that the Room4Change accommodation is valued in providing an alternative accommodation option for the men to use when they are feeling escalated. Likewise, men have commented that the accommodation has supported them to engage in the men's behaviour change work as it has provided a space to 'stop' and consider in a supportive environment the changes that they hope to work towards.

An external evaluation of Room4Change by the Australian National University is currently underway. This work will provide future guidance to DVCS about how best to utilise the accommodation and other program components to maximise safety and support change. DVCS and the Room4Change program are open to new and innovative approaches that will be imperative for the growth and development of men's behaviour change work in Australia.

h) The experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTQI women, women with a disability, and women on temporary visas.

The ACT recognises that although DFV is a gendered issue where women and their children represent the largest proportion of victims, there are other people whose experience of DFV falls outside the heteronormative context. The ACT Government also recognises that people who experience DFV come from all backgrounds, and every person's experience of this violence is unique.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have brought the complex issues facing their community in regard to DFV to the attention of the ACT Government through *the We Don't Shoot Our Wounded*⁶ and *the Change our Future - Share what you know*⁷ reports.

The Office of the Coordinator General for Family Safety is committed to supporting community-led responses to these reports and to leading the delivery of government actions that respond to the reports and that allow for community-led responses.

The ACT Government has committed \$354,000 over four years (2019-20 to 2021-22) to work with representatives from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, including the Elected Body and the Domestic Violence Prevention Council's new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group to develop specific action in response to the recommendations of these reports and support community-designed responses.

Also underway is the *Our Booris, Our Way* review, which focusses on systemic improvements needed to address the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system in the ACT. The Interim Report from the *Our Booris, Our Way* review was provided to the ACT Government on 31 August 2018, and a final report was provided in 2019.

In July 2020, the ACT Government responded to the *Our Booris, Our Way* review. This response addressed each of the 28 recommendations for systemic change in child protection and out of home care in order to:

- safely reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care;
- improve their experience and outcomes while in care; and
- where appropriate, exit children from care.

Future ACT Government work on preventing and responding to DFV for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community will align with the principles of *the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028* and support self-determination.

⁶https://www.victimsupport.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/793397/We_Dont_Shoot_Our_Wounded-Community_Report_09.pdf

⁷<https://www.dvpc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Final-report-ATSI-Forum.pdf>

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People

The ACT Government supports people of non-English speaking backgrounds experiencing DFV by providing increased access to translating and interpreting services (TIS). The Safer Families TIS initiative is administered by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and funds specific resources for translating and interpreting in Legal Aid, community legal centres, DFV specialist services and for Family Violence Order processes in ACT Courts.

In 2018 the ACT Magistrates Court held a consultation workshop with representatives from the ACT culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community, key agencies and nongovernment organisations to consider ways to improve access to courts for the CALD community when seeking protection from DFV in the ACT. An Action Plan was developed to increase cultural awareness and capability of court staff, improve the experience in court for CALD people and improve community education and outreach. Many of these recommendations have already been implemented by ACT Courts.

Women on temporary visas

The ACT Government notes that the current Fourth Action Plan to deliver the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women 2010-22* prioritises community-led and targeted policies and services to address the disproportionate impact of violence and inequality on women on temporary visas and their children. The ACT Government has consistently elevated the experiences and responses for women on temporary visas as a national priority. However, the National Plan expires in 2022 and considerable supports and reform are still necessary to offer a pathway to safety for women on temporary visas.

The ACT Government supports recommendations made by the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence as the framework for reform. Their 2019 *Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence who are on Temporary Visas* (the Blueprint) was developed and endorsed by over fifty state and national peak bodies and service providers in the women's safety and settlement sectors.

The Blueprint proposes reform to the migration system, eligibility to government social and financial supports (such as Medicare and income supports), and improved specialist support with cultural competence and gendered expertise. These areas of legislative, policy and service reform fall within federal jurisdiction and require the Australian Government to take action to ensure that policies and programs support the safety and recovery of all women and children, regardless of visa status and protect women on temporary visas from further traumatisation.

The specific recommendations for Commonwealth action are to:

- improve the migration system so that all women on temporary visas who experience violence and their dependents can access protections, services and justice;
- ensure eligibility and access to services and government support are based on women's needs for safety and recovery, regardless of their migration status; and
- ensure immediate and full access to safety, protection, justice and fully funded specialist support with demonstrated gender expertise and cultural competency for women on temporary visas who have experienced violence and their dependents.

The ACT Government is already doing significant work to support women on temporary visas in the areas of reform proposed for state and territory level. Recommendations for state-territory reform include:

- improve eligibility to access social and public housing;

- eligibility and access to all tiers of education (from childcare services to schools, vocational training and tertiary education);
- eligibility and access to free interpreting services; and
- mandatory training and professional development for government workers who come into contact with women on temporary visas.

Key programs and initiatives within the ACT to better support women on temporary visas include:

ACT Services Access Card

The ACT Services Card is an essential resource for asylum seekers (on bridging visas) who are settling in the ACT and applying for a protection visa. The Card allows eligible asylum seekers to access a range of free or subsidised services, including:

- enrolment in ACT public schools and preschools with international fees waived;
- health services that would be provided under Medicare (for asylum seekers who are ineligible for Medicare), including GPs, hospital and ambulance services and other health services;
- free English language classes through the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT);
- transit between the ACT & Queanbeyan & taxi subsidy;
- free legal aid services;
- public library services and English conversation classes held in libraries;
- public Trustee services (preparation of wills and enduring Power of Attorney); and
- women's return to work individual grant of up to \$1,000 to improve job-readiness of women who have been away from paid work for extended time due to caring responsibilities and may face significant barriers returning to work.

MARSS Homelessness Initiative

The Homelessness Initiative delivered by Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services (MARSS) provides medium term accommodation and case management supports for families with uncertain immigration status who are at risk of falling into crisis and homelessness without appropriate intervention. The initiative provides service users with:

- a dedicated case manager who provides warm referrals to programs and services such as employment readiness, education and training needs, English language support, social and health supports offered by both by MARRS and other community-based organisations; and
- housing and tenancy support to families to help secure private rental housing or social housing if service users experience constraints (i.e. financial, physical, or health).

Safer Families Enhancing access to justice for non-English speakers

The Safer Families Enhancing access to justice for non-English speakers initiative supports people of non-English speaking backgrounds experiencing DFV by providing increased access to translating and interpreting services (TIS) across service settings, including Legal Aid, community legal centres, DFV specialist services and for Family Violence Order processes in the Courts.

ACT Government DFV Training Strategy

The ACT Government DFV Training Strategy includes foundation training for all public service employees and further specific training for managers. The foundation training equips workers with the ability to recognise and respond to DFV, and includes content related to specific groups in the community who face unique barriers to seeking help with DFV, including migrant women. More advanced training provides for

frontline workers who come into contact with women on temporary visas, such as frontline housing workers.

Registered Migration Agent

The Registered Migration Agent at Legal Aid ACT also provides significant legal assistance to Partner Visa applicants who are the victims of family violence, in such areas as employment, criminal and family law. Referrals are regularly received from Canberra's multicultural service providers and DFV refugees. This initiative is no longer funded by the Department of Home Affairs' Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme (IAAAS) which reduced eligibility to select asylum seekers. The ACT Government advocates for a continuation of this funding as it provides a vital service to women on temporary visas.

LGBTIQ people

The *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy 2011-2017* stated the ACT Government's commitment to end violence against women and children, and recognised that that "domestic and family violence and sexual assault are gendered crimes." While it is unequivocally the case that the majority of DFV is perpetrated by heterosexual men against women and children, there are other people whose experience of DFV violence falls outside the heteronormative context.

There is evidence to suggest that a significant proportion of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTIQ) communities will experience DFV of some kind in the course of their lives.

Understanding the needs of this vulnerable group is critical if we are to be successful in making changes that will lead to a more effective ACT service response for them.

Research completed by the ACT's Women's Centre for Health Matters sought to make visible the issue of DFV violence amongst LGBTIQ communities in the ACT where it may be unrecognised or hidden.

Participants were asked to complete an online survey with qualitative and quantitative questions to collect both qualitative and quantitative data about respondents' experiences. This included how they came to realise they or the person they were supporting was experiencing DFV, their motivation and reasoning for not seeking assistance, and for those who had sought help, where they sought help and what that experience was like. Finally, respondents were asked to reflect on what could be done to better support LGBTIQ people who are experiencing DFV in the ACT.

One of the barriers made clear by the experience of the respondents within this report is that the LGBTIQ community cannot see themselves reflected in the operations of a service. This lack of reflection is a contributing factor to the fact that many respondents identified that they were less likely to identify DFV in their relationships, because of a lack of understanding that what was happening to them was DFV.

Understanding the needs of this vulnerable group is critical if we are to be successful in making changes that will lead to a more effective ACT service response for them.

The ACT also recognises that LGBTQI children living in non-LGBTIQ families can experience DFV as a result of their identity and be the sole victim of DFV in their family.

People with Disability

The ACT Government recognises that people with disabilities require support to ensure they are able to access DFV services. During the co-design of the Family Safety Hub, key research insights were collected to better understand how services can be more accessible, responsive and effective to provide better support, earlier. During this process, women with disability were identified as being one of the least likely groups to access DFV services.

People with disability who are experiencing DFV can seek support or referral from a number of organisations in the ACT. Some of these organisations also provide advocacy for people with disability across a range of experiences that include DFV. These organisations include:

- DVCS, who provide 24 hour a day crisis intervention, legal advice, safety planning and advocacy;
- Advocacy for Inclusion, a disability advocacy group that provides independent individual and self-advocacy for people with disability;
- ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service, an independent advocacy organisation supporting people with disabilities, older people and their carers; and
- The Integrated Service Response Program provided through the Office for Disability in the Community Services Directorate, which provides short-term coordination support for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants who have high or complex support needs.

The *ACT Government Disability Justice Strategy 2019–2029* aims to achieve equity and inclusion for people with disability in the justice system. In doing so, it recognises that equality before the law is not the current reality for many ACT residents with disability. This work has a focus on the safety and rights of people with disability, the responsiveness of the justice system and how we can achieve and measure change.

The Disability Justice Strategy also aims to help the justice system to build capability to provide a better response to people with disability, including through the provision of reasonable adjustments. Finally, it aims to assist the service sector identify the needs of people with disability, recognise that early support can prevent future contact with the justice system, and promote the creation of services which prevent, reduce and break the cycle of contact with the justice system.

i) The impact of natural disasters and other significant events such as COVID-19, including health requirements such as staying at home, on the prevalence of domestic violence and provision of support services.

j) The views and experiences of frontline services, advocacy groups and others throughout this unprecedented time.

In the ACT, the first half of 2020 saw unprecedented challenges due to bushfire season, which was soon followed by the outbreak of COVID–19. The COVID–19 pandemic brought some additional challenges for families as the self-isolating and lockdown requirements exacerbated the risks for women and children who live with perpetrators of violence. This risk was compounded further as health and economic stressors increased.

The COVID-19 pandemic also brought significant challenges for the ACT service system as essential government and community organisations worked hard to transition to different ways of providing support. The challenges and demands placed on our human services sector, particularly on our community partners, was unprecedented. Canberrans met these challenges by working together in positive and collaborative partnerships to make sure our essential services were open and operating to keep families safe during lock-down.

The Office of the Coordinator General for Family Safety is coordinating regular round table meetings of the DFV sector which have provided a local mechanism for quickly identifying and prioritising sector wide issues. This roundtable is also important for facilitating planning, coordination and responses, including getting accurate and consistent communication out across the community.

In April 2020 the ACT Government announced \$3 million in community support funding, which included \$1.7 million to support people facing homelessness or DFV during the COVID-19 pandemic. The community support package provided immediate financial support for community providers, with \$550,000 allocated to respond to an increase in demand for DFV and sexual assault services and provide emergency accommodation to women, children and families experiencing DFV. This included boosting the Safer Families assistance grants by \$125,000 and funding for DVCS and Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. These frontline services received \$350,000 and \$75,000 respectively.

Some of the accommodation and homelessness funding which will support people escaping DFV includes initiatives aimed at addressing increased demand and providing more temporary accommodation options. Additional funding has been provided for both emergency and long-term accommodation for men, women and children who face the challenge of physical distancing in shelters, self-isolation when needed and potential quarantine.

The ACT Government also announced a Provider Support Fund, which includes \$1 million in grant funding to support community services organisations adopt innovative ways to conduct essential business so providers could continue operations remotely.

k) An audit of previous parliamentary reviews focused on domestic and family violence.

The ACT Government support the audit of previous parliamentary reviews focused on domestic and family violence.

l) Any other related matters.

Australian Law Reform Commission Inquiry

The ACT Government urges the Commonwealth to respond to the Australian Law Reform Commission Inquiry Report Family Law for the Future: An Inquiry into the Family Law System. This report made sixty recommendations from 200 consultations around Australia, including consultations with twelve organisations from the ACT.

Developing the next *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*

The ACT Government looks forward to working with the Commonwealth to design the next *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*.

The ACT would like the next National Plan to focus on:

- more support for people with diverse experiences of DFV (as addressed in ToR h), such as women on temporary visas;
- better access to housing, health and economic support for people escaping violence;
- recognition that children and young people have unique experiences of living with DFV that may not be same as the experience of their non-violent parent, and that their experience should be heard and understood to develop appropriate responses;

- holding perpetrators to account for their violence, including a greater focus on perpetrator risk assessment; and
- a more coordinated approach to information and data sharing at a national level.

The next National Plan should also address the emerging medium and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people who experience DFV. Emerging international evidence is clear about the gendered impact of the pandemic that will have enduring impacts on drivers of gender equality, such as paid care work, gender representation in response planning and women's economic security. These drivers of gender equality are known to intersect with women's safety, and this limits options for help-seeking and recovery.

The ACT Select Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic Response has heard from the local women's safety sector that there will be longer-term effects resulting from COVID-19 that will impact the prevalence, complexity and thus the responses to domestic and family violence. Some issues raised were:

- a need for more flexible and integrated service delivery models such as health-justice partnerships and remote service delivery models;
- a need for continued investments in women's specialist DFV and homelessness services who will experience service pressure and demand as the pandemic continues;
- the effects of trauma for women and children who have been unable to access adequate support due to social distancing restrictions;
- the effects of trauma on women who have not been able to reach out to informal social supports (such as family or neighbours) which has impacted both their mental health and help-seeking capacity and access; and
- risk assessment and management for children and young people should their mothers become hospitalised or sick.

Considerations should also be made in developing recovery planning for disaster and crisis recovery, as discussed in ToR i.



Community Services Directorate

2020