

Australian
BAPTIST
MINISTRIES



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A report on domestic violence
services in Australian communities

Acknowledgments

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**BAPTIST CARE
AUSTRALIA**

Executive summary

Awareness of the serious and widespread nature of domestic and family violence in Australian communities has increased substantially in recent years, particularly since 2015 when Rosie Batty was awarded the Australian of the Year.

Efforts to raise community awareness of family and domestic violence have not yet reduced its incidence nor achieved substantial changes in gender values and attitudes. There has however been a rise in the number of people seeking support services.

In 2017, the Australian Baptist movement sought to increase awareness of this issue among Baptist churches and to support churches to respond positively and meaningfully to family and domestic violence in their churches and wider communities. The No Place for Violence Here campaign asked participating churches to undertake a learning journey to increase awareness about family and domestic violence. This included exploring and understanding the support services available in their local communities. The results of this survey of family and domestic violence support services form the basis of this report.

Volunteers surveyed 66 support services across 28 electorates around Australia. Responses showed that a large number of specialist services are not sufficiently

resourced to meet the demand for their services. Service providers described a chronic shortage of accommodation options for people escaping violent situations and lack of resourcing to move beyond crisis services to address prevention, longer-term support issues, or to provide services to people with unique needs.

There are currently no national data collections that catalogue all available support services and their capacity to meet demand. Other surveys that have been conducted of particular services or regions have also shown a consistent pattern of service providers unable to meet the demand for their services.

This report makes three recommendations:

1. Build a comprehensive national database of family and domestic violence support services.
2. Increase investment in safe, secure, and affordable housing.
3. Immediately increase funding from State and Federal governments to address shortfalls in crisis and short term accommodation.

Policy context



Domestic and family violence is one of Australia's most serious and pressing social issues.

One in four women and one in thirteen men have experienced at least one incidence of violence by a current or former intimate partner. Intimate partner violence contributes more to illness, disability, and death than any other risk factor for women aged 25-44. One quarter of all homicides are committed by a current or former partner, with an average of one woman each week and one man per month murdered by a current or former partner.

The toll of domestic and family violence is substantial. Domestic and family violence is currently the leading cause of homelessness in Australia and is a key contributor to children being placed in out-of-home care.

In addition to the societal costs of domestic and family violence, there is also a significant economic cost, estimated to be \$22 billion annually.

Australian public attention on domestic and

family violence started to gather force in the 1970s, but it was only in the first decade of this century that it became the focus of widespread public concern. As a result of this increased awareness, all levels of government have been forced to act, developing comprehensive plans to reduce and respond to domestic and family violence.

The Council of Australian Governments *Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children* is intended to guide a comprehensive and coordinated response toward six key outcomes: communities are safe and free from violence; relationships are respectful; indigenous communities are strengthened; services meet the needs of women and their children; justice responses are effective; and perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.

While there has been some progress made in changing public attitudes, there is still a lot to be done. The National Community Attitudes Survey shows there was little positive change and some backward movement in community attitudes to violence against women over the decade to 2013. This lack of progress in changing attitudes should

not be seen as a failure, but as a signal of the complexity of changing attitudes and behaviours, and although much is known about many aspects of domestic and family violence, there

As community awareness about violence against women increases and condemnation of domestic and family violence and sexual abuse becomes more widespread, demand for support services has also continued to increase.

Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (2016)

are several data gaps that need to be filled so a comprehensive picture of the extent and impact of the problem can be communicated.

Demand for services is rising

Whatever progress has been achieved to date, it has not yet resulted in a decline in the incidence of domestic and family violence. In its third *Personal Safety Survey* in 2016, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported an increase in the number of both women and men who have experienced intimate partner violence since the survey was first taken in 2005. The survey found that in 2016, over 149,000 women had sought help and support in responding to violence from a current partner, an increase of 35,000 compared to the previous survey.

Increased demand for support has been linked not only to the increase in the incidence of family and domestic violence but also to increased community awareness of domestic and family violence. As the stigma of domestic and family violence is reduced, more people are feeling empowered to access services and support.

The increase in demand has caused many service providers to operate under an increasing amount of pressure. This was recognised by the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence where the commissioners noted:

Demand is one of the toughest challenges facing specialist family violence services in Victoria. The number of people reporting family violence incidents to police has grown substantially in recent years, and the consequent increase in demand has had a dramatic effect on specialist family violence services, as well as on the police and the courts. The level of funding for specialist family violence services has not kept pace with the increase in demand for these services. This has led to strained and ad hoc service responses and has had a number of effects on the way services are delivered. Services have had to divert resources from case-management support to process the increased number of police referrals. This risks referrals being heavily triaged, with only the most serious being attended to. In this way, opportunities to intervene early, before the violence escalates, are lost.

The conclusions of the Royal Commission have been confirmed by other analyses, including:

KPMG Audit of Domestic Violence Services in Queensland

A survey of service providers identified gaps in service delivery around housing and emergency accommodation; perpetrator programs; early intervention and prevention programs; and access to legal and other support services in rural areas.

Victorian Support Services Working Group, Review Of Crisis Accommodation Services (2017)

It was concluded that crisis support and accommodation services were vital for many people who experience domestic and family violence but that the inability of services to meet existing demand had led to the creation of high-level risk assessment thresholds that excluded many who needed the services.

Addressing data gaps

One of the problems faced by both government and the community sector is the lack of available data that considers demand for domestic and family violence services. The exact distribution and nature of increasing demand is difficult to determine given the lack of available data collections on services provided by specialist family and domestic violence agencies. There is little data available on the services and responses that victims and perpetrators receive, including specialist services, mainstream services, and justice responses.

There are a number of actions that can be taken to improve the current data collection. Importantly, a set of common and consistent definitions to improve identification and measurement needs to be developed. In addition, we need to enhance data collection to better understand people at risk and the services they use. It is for this reason that the creation of a comprehensive national database of family and domestic violence support services is so important.

In recognition of this, the Victorian Royal Commission recommended in addition to an immediate increase in funding for domestic and family violence services, the development of forecasting tools and indicators to assist in the determination of demand to ensure the adequate financing of services (recommendations 12 and 223).

Intersectionality between domestic violence and housing

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that 40% of clients interacting with Specialist Homelessness Services have

experienced domestic or family violence.

People experiencing family and domestic violence may be more likely to ‘cycle’ in and out of homelessness services due to the difficulty they face in either staying away or leaving the family home altogether after incidents of violence.



The lack of safe, secure, long-term, affordable housing means that people accessing emergency accommodation services often return to the family home because their stay is short and unlikely to result in a longer term housing solution or increased financial independence.

It is important to recognise this link between housing and domestic and family violence if we are to appropriately provide the supports necessary for people to leave violent relationships.

Our survey

Recognising the lack of available data in relation to the capacity of family and domestic violence services to meet demand, engaged volunteers from churches within the Baptist network undertook a survey of family and domestic violence service providers in their local area. The survey was conducted during July and August 2018 across 28 federal electorates.

Service providers were asked a range of questions to determine:

- the types of services offered
- demand for their particular service
- consequences for clients if the service was not able to support them

- additional resources needed to keep up with demand.

The organisations contacted provide a range of direct and indirect services to people experiencing family and domestic violence including:

- counselling
- crisis accommodation
- transitional accommodation
- legal advice
- crisis support and referral.

Location of service providers contacted

State	Region	Number contacted	Electorates
NSW	Northwest Sydney	9	Bennelong, Berowra, Mitchell
NSW	Southern Sydney	5	Cook, Barton
NSW	Central Coast	16	Dobell, Bennelong
NSW	Riverina	1	Farer
QLD	Regional	2	Kennedy, Ipswich
SA	Adelaide	4	Adelaide, Mayo
TAS	Tasmania	13	Lyons, Bass, Braddon, Franklin
VIC	Melbourne metro	3	McNamara, Higgins, Goldstein
VIC	Regional	2	Corio, Corangamite, Mallee
WA	Karratha, Pilbara	4	Durack
WA	Perth metro	5	Stirling, Hasluck, Pearce, Brand
WA	South West	8	O'Connor, Forest, Canning

Results

For ease of interpretation, results have been presented in two categories: accommodation providers and all other services.

Accommodation services

Of the twenty-nine crisis and transitional accommodation service providers contacted, 74% reported a lack of ability to provide accommodation to all who needed it.

Ten organisations provided detailed accounts of the number of people they were turning away from their service:

- One organisation turned away one person for every eleven clients they could service
- Two organisations turned away one person for every person they could accommodate
- Two organisations turned away twice the number of people they could accommodate
- Five organisations turned away between four and eight people for every client they could accommodate.

In addition, 42% of the accommodation services contacted identified that they were not able to provide the wrap-around services necessary to support people who were leaving violent situations. This was predominantly due to a lack of funding and funding criteria that excluded certain population groups (such as migrants on certain visas, people experiencing extended family violence and men).

When reflecting on the consequences for women and children escaping domestic and family violence, service providers identified that their inability to provide crisis accommodation was often pushing people either into homelessness or back into the abusive situation they were trying to flee.

Several accommodation providers (41%) also

identified a significant lack of funding to offer early intervention and education programs aimed at preventing violence from occurring in the first place.

When asked to comment on the consequences of their inability to meet the demand for emergency accommodation, three outcomes were identified:

- Some women and children were accommodated for limited periods of time in motels. This could be expensive, dangerous, and women and children often do not receive the support services they require.
- Some women and children became homeless, living rough, in their cars, or couch surfing. Living rough or in their cars left women and children vulnerable.
- Some women and children returned to the abusive situation they were trying to flee.

When asked what additional resourcing would be necessary for their organisation to be able to appropriately meet demand, providers commented on the need for long-term funding that provides organisational security, significant capital investment in accommodation options and funding that enabled them to work on longer-term preventative and support measures.

Other services

The survey also captured a range of community service organisations that provide both direct and indirect domestic and family violence support services. These organisations included specialist family and domestic violence organisations offering crisis support, case management and counselling (19); community legal centres (2); helplines (3); and general community services (13).

When asked specifically about their capacity to deliver domestic and family violence services, more than three quarters (76%) of the 35 organisations surveyed felt that they were not able to meet the demand for their services.

Service providers' ability to achieve outcomes for clients was primarily based on two key issues:

- The significant shortage of safe and affordable accommodation options to refer clients, and
- A lack of funding to provide the full suite of preventative and long-term post-crisis services that they believe was required.

Funding was a key issue for many organisations surveyed. Several providers commented that the amount per client they are contracted to provide is not adequate to appropriately support women and children escaping domestic violence. For example, a community legal centre commented that it is funded to provide one hour of support per client. In the vast majority of circumstances this hour is not adequate to address the complex legal concerns that people leaving violent situations may have.

In addition it was noted that the needs of people impacted by family and domestic violence often fall out of the remit of some community service organisations and as a result they are unable to cater for their specific needs.

Due to the high demand for services and competing priorities for many community service organisations, there are significant limitations on an organisation's ability to provide some services in a timely fashion, often triaging or prioritising clients based on immediate need.

Conclusions

The survey results identify two key issues:

1. There is a significant lack of safe, secure, and affordable housing options for people seeking to leave abusive relationships, and, the consequences of this can be quite traumatic. There is a shortage of suitable crisis and emergency accommodation and of secure, long term social or affordable housing.
2. The vast majority of organisations that provide domestic and family violence services are fully stretched and only able to meet the demand for their services by either limiting what they offer or to whom they offer it.

From one volunteer:

My take away from meeting with various service providers in northwest Sydney is that they are doing a tremendous job of trying to help wherever they can but are limited with what they can provide due to very tight budgetary constraints. Often to supplement, they spend valuable time that could be spent with these women preparing grant applications... a lot of their days are filled with ringing around and trying to get workable solutions for their clients from other stretched service providers.

Recommendations

1. Build a comprehensive national database of family and domestic violence support services

One of the significant barriers to providing better services is the lack of available data.

The Federal Government should take a leadership role and coordinate the development of a comprehensive national database of family and domestic violence services. This should be done in collaboration and cooperation with the States and Territories. High quality and nationally-consistent data will allow governments to commit to more predictable funding models that would give service providers the security and funding they need to meet demand.

This recommendation is consistent with the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children* which recognises that improved data collection and analysis will lead to better outcomes for survivors.

2. Increase investment in safe, secure, and affordable housing

The absence of a nationally consistent housing and homelessness strategy has led to the neglect of social and affordable housing across the country. As a result, there is often nowhere to go for people who are trying to leave a violent relationship. We know that the lack of safe and secure housing, and the risk of homelessness, is one of the reasons people do not leave violent relationships.

There must be an immediate increase in the supply of safe housing and accommodation for women and their children escaping violence, which includes housing options across the

housing continuum. There is a current shortfall of 500,000 social and affordable homes nationally.

The lack of sufficient social housing stock has created a bottleneck that causes people to stay in crisis and transitional accommodation services longer than preferable, which places pressure on an already overburdened system.

Without a significant investment in social and affordable housing, we will continue to push people who are experiencing family or domestic violence into homelessness, or back into the violent relationships they were trying to escape in the first place.

3. Immediately increase in funding from State and Federal governments to address shortfalls in crisis and short term accommodation

Rapid access to long term housing is needed and is far preferable to short term or transitional accommodation options. However, while sufficient housing stock is built, current shortfalls in funding for short term accommodation options suitable for domestic and family violence survivors need to be addressed. Both State and Federal governments can play a role in meeting the urgent needs for safe accommodation that will prevent survivors returning to unsafe situations.

How is the Baptist movement responding?

In November 2017, A Just Cause, which is a national advocacy arm of Australian Baptist Ministries, launched *No Place for Violence Here*, a campaign designed to help local churches build awareness of family and domestic violence, respond in a healthy manner to the households in their church and community that experience violence, and to address dimensions of church culture that contribute to violence.

Baptist Care Australia community service agencies help people affected by family violence to heal and rebuild their lives. Services include individual and group counselling for survivors, perpetrators, and for children. Early intervention programs target young men affected by violence. Crisis and medium-term accommodation services include a range of education and support programs and a no-interest loan scheme to buy household items.

The international development work of Baptist World Aid Australia includes projects to empower women and provide security and safety to women and children fleeing violence. The research and advocacy work of Behind the Barcode is helping to end violent exploitation of women and other vulnerable workers in developing countries. Baptist World Aid's 'Catalyst' advocacy groups around the country will also continue to highlight this issue in their churches and communities.

Definitions

Domestic violence: A set of violent behaviours between current or former intimate partners, where one partner aims to exert power and control over the other through fear. Domestic violence can include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse and psychological abuse.

Family violence: Violence between family members as well as between current or former intimate partners. For example, family violence can include acts of violence between a parent and a child. Family violence is the preferred term used to identify experiences of violence for Indigenous Australians as it encompasses the broad range of extended family and kinship relationships in which violence may occur.

Intimate partner violence: A set of violent behaviours between current or former intimate partners.

Partner violence: A set of violent behaviours between current or former intimate partners, but does not include violence by a boyfriend/girlfriend or date.

Short term or emergency accommodation: In this report short term or emergency accommodation refers to refuges, crisis shelters and specialist homelessness agencies.

Specialist homelessness service: Assistance provided specifically to people who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness.

Transitional accommodation: Transitional housing is a form of social housing delivered by registered community housing providers for applicants listed on the housing register with very high or high housing needs. Transitional housing is not long-term housing.

