



30 July 2020

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia (the Society) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs' Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence.

The Society is a lay Catholic charitable organisation that comprises over 60,000 members and volunteers and over 3,000 employees and has an extensive history providing on-the-ground assistance in the form of emergency relief and accommodation, community housing and other support services to families across Australia. Many of these families have experienced or are at risk of family, domestic and sexual violence (violence). The Society has consulted with its state and territory entities in preparing this submission.

Service footprint varies across the country

The Society operates as a federated model, underpinned by the principles of subsidiarity which means that services, use of funds and policy are informed by conference members at the local level, who in turn advise regional/state councils, state presidents and National Council.

This grass roots model means that the service footprint varies across the states and territories. For the most part, the Society uses its own funds to assist people experiencing or at risk of violence.

Assistance ranges from emergency relief (food vouchers, help with paying bills, transport etc) to crisis, transitional or community accommodation with wrap-around support. Support includes access to counselling and group programs (such as social connectedness, parenting and financial management skills), referral to specialist services (such as health, legal and financial services) and general advocacy and assistance. A list of the Society's violence services is at **Attachment A**.

Vinnies NSW – the importance of child-centred practice

Vinnies NSW provides the following information on their violence services, which are subsidised by their fundraising activities. This means they are able to assist those who might fall outside the eligibility criteria for specific service packages or grant guidelines.

Vinnies NSW has a strong focus on child safety and on building their capacity to respond to the needs of children in families experiencing domestic and family violence:

- Child safety is supported through an internal Safeguarding Team. The Team provides several support and compliance functions to ensure that the organisation is meeting its legislative requirements and is providing quality, child-centred practice. The core focus is to embed the *NSW Child Safe Standards* and the *Catholic Professional Standards* across all operational areas, from governance through to volunteers and members, and especially in the delivery of services that support women and children experiencing or at risk of domestic violence. The Team also provides an internal child protection reporting service, 1800 4SUPPORT. Between January-June 2020, 1800 4SUPPORT received over 460 reports organisation-wide, with 15 percent of those reports relating to domestic violence concerns.
- Staff are sufficiently resourced to be able to focus on meeting the needs of children and young people. Children whose families are accessing domestic violence services are often extremely traumatised, yet their needs are often overlooked as the focus is on supporting the parent. Through child-centred case practice within homelessness services, children and young people whose families are accessing support can get help to improve their health, education and developmental needs. Domestic violence services are implementing this framework through upskilling their workforce in child-centred practice and adapting their service delivery to better support children and young people.

In doing so, children are provided access to a dedicated worker/case manager who identifies any issues that need to be addressed, has access to brokerage funding (e.g. for counselling) and can engage children and parents in age-appropriate activities. However, implementation of this framework is subsidised by donors/philanthropic funding which means there is no longer-term funding certainty.

Where can improvements be made to service responses?

Accessibility to services varies depending on where the person seeking help resides. For example, while Vinnies NSW violence services have a strong working relationship with the Start Safely rental assistance program in some locations, in others, the program is much harder to access. Similarly, while the Staying Home Leaving Violence program works well, it is only available to women in a limited number of postcodes.

Eligibility criteria vary between services and, in some cases, this creates a mismatched service system. For example, eligibility criteria for the Domestic Violence Rapid Enhancement Program is extremely broad – it is open to anyone experiencing domestic violence – but there are limited referral pathways for some groups of women. In the case of Vinnies NSW South East and South West Sydney violence services, there is a lack of onward referral pathways for single women.

In NSW, more work is needed to ensure police understand domestic violence and routinely offer women appropriate referrals. Police are often the first point of contact following a domestic violence incident and the extent to which appropriate referrals are made following a police intervention is very dependent on individual officers. Vinnies NSW invests significant time establishing relationships with police stations to ensure officers understand the services and supports that are available to women in their area, but this needs to be done regularly as staff move on.

More investment is needed in public awareness raising. Local domestic violence committees have been established as part of the NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women. Where these committees are active, they have been successful in driving awareness campaigns across the broader community, including involving the business community.

Some cohorts are at great risk of violence than others and their needs are different

Some of the experiences relevant to particular cohorts of women include:

- For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, some services are not culturally appropriate. Vinnies NSW is working to improve the cultural appropriateness of its services but cultural barriers are inherent in some service models and/or broader policy settings. For example, some Aboriginal women are not comfortable staying in a refuge where the environment is institutionalised, and where rules have been established to support communal-style living. Where individual units are available – such as in Amelie House in Southern Sydney – these issues are easier to address.
- For women living with disability, in some instances the perpetrator may be the carer. This makes it very difficult to identify opportunities, including safe locations, to connect with the client. There is also a lack of accessible refuges and longer-term accommodation options, particularly in the private rental market.
- Women on temporary visas face additional challenges. Their visa status, lack of income and ineligibility for social housing make it very difficult to achieve a good housing outcome. This means they often end up living in refuges for extended periods. Many of these women often have histories of trauma and complex needs and they need additional support. Vinnies NSW has seen a significant increase in women on temporary visas accessing services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Earlier this year, Vinnies NSW collaborated with several organisations on the *Foundations Housing Project: A scoping study to explore alternative housing options for people seeking asylum in Sydney*. The project included a point in time survey of domestic violence services across Sydney and found that of the 253 rooms available across the 36 services that responded to the survey, 4% were occupied by women seeking asylum and 25% by women on other temporary visas.¹ The project is now continuing to investigate alternative housing models while working to identify pathways for broader reform. In particular, access to government-funded housing and homelessness services should not be dependent on a person's visa status.
- For culturally and linguistically diverse women, access to interpreters through the Translating and Interpreting Service is generally good. However, there are some languages for which only

a limited number of interpreters are available, or there are only male interpreters. In addition, it can be difficult to find a bilingual counsellor, and providing counselling through an interpreter is typically less effective.

- For women living in rural areas, domestic violence is often hidden and there are fewer reports. This may be for many reasons including living further apart with fewer opportunities for social interaction, living in small communities where anonymity is difficult or having fewer support services to access.
- For older women, finding appropriate and affordable accommodation can be challenging, as many have no rental history and this adds to the challenge of securing a lease in the private market. Affordability is a major barrier and for older women of working age, there are limited opportunities for employment particularly for those with no or limited history of formal, paid, employment. For women with limited mobility, the lack of accessible accommodation is also a major barrier. Our Lady of the Way crisis accommodation service in Western Sydney supports single women over the age of 50. Vinnies NSW has been able to secure homes for a number of these women in accommodation built by Amelie Housing, through the NSW Government's Social and Affordable Housing Fund.

The Society notes the importance of being adequately resourced to take a trauma-informed and child centred approach to service delivery. The Society notes the particular barriers faced by children and young people experiencing violence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living in regional and remote communities, women living with disability, women of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women on temporary visas and older women. Research shows that most of these cohorts are at greater risk of violence. Currently far too many are falling through the cracks because the service system is not adequately resourced or tailored to address their needs.

Violence, homelessness and the inadequate supply of safe, affordable housing

Family and domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women with children and is cited as the main reason for women and children leaving their homes.ⁱⁱ Providers of housing are therefore a key touch point for this group. In 2016–17, about 72,000 women, 34,000 children and 9,000 men seeking homelessness services reported that family and domestic violence caused or contributed to their homelessness.ⁱⁱⁱ

The reality is that many people trying to leave a violent household have nowhere to go and usually end up couch-surfing or staying with family and friends.^{iv} The rate of females assisted by homelessness services who had experienced family and domestic violence rose by 32% between 2013–14 and 2017–18. For males, this rate rose by 40%. We do not believe it is possible to address family and domestic violence without addressing the chronic shortage of safe, affordable community and social housing.

Shortage of accommodation options

There is a lack of refuges in some locations (for example, in Western NSW). This means that women face the prospect of leaving the local area with which they are familiar, and where they have connections and support. There is also a lack of services for single men and fathers which means that when they are leaving violent relationships, they are often housed in transitional accommodation which is not ideal and is too short-term.

The majority of domestic violence refuges cannot take pets and for many women this can be a factor when trying to leave a violent relationship. While a number of initiatives have been developed to address this issue – for example, RSPCA's Community Domestic Violence Program (formerly called Safe Beds for Pets) – these are only available to women in some locations and are often over-subscribed. For women from farming households, a reluctance to leave animals in their care at home – particularly large animals – presents an additional barrier.

With respect to accessing short-term accommodation and longer-term housing options, some temporary accommodation options are not trauma informed and residents do not feel safe. An environment where residents are exposed to fights or co-located with people with complex mental health issues is difficult for people who are already traumatised.

There is also a lack of affordable rental housing. This is particularly problematic for people on the JobSeeker Payment because it is almost impossible to find affordable private rentals in most parts of Sydney and in many regional centres. Long wait times, of between 5 and 10+ years in many parts of

the State, for social housing limit the choices available to those trying to leave a violent relationship and often forces people into unsafe situations.

What is possible when funding for accommodation is available – Vinnies NSW

The Society is a significant provider of different types of accommodation, ranging from crisis, transitional, and supported accommodation through to community housing. The Society is the largest provider of homelessness services in Queensland and operates Amelie Housing which, in the last financial year, rolled out 1200 dwellings across New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia. The Society has available land to build on and we are 'shovel ready' but without access to government funding, this important work cannot be progressed.

For example, increased investment in housing means that Vinnies NSW are able to offer different models of refuge and accommodation options, suited to the diverse needs of women and children leaving violent relationships. Amelie House crisis accommodation and case management services in southern Sydney offer safe, individual unit accommodation rather than separate bedrooms with shared common areas. This type of accommodation is preferable for some cohorts, such as women with older male children, women with multiple and complex conditions including mental health issues, women for whom traditional refuge models are not culturally appropriate, such as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and women seeking asylum with a history of trauma. The units are also accessible for those living with disability.

A Domestic Violence Enhancement program, which provides after hours support for women and children in unsafe housing, is also available in a number of locations in NSW. This, together with violence-specific homelessness service packages, means that a trauma-informed, case-managed approach to service delivery can be implemented.

The co-location of Vinnies NSW's domestic violence workers with NSW's Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)-funded housing workers has resulted in strong working relationships, strengthened referral pathways and improved access to housing products, such as the Start Safely rental assistance program.

Vinnies NSW has also been involved in the Start Safely Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) Pilot Program, where a Start Safely Specialist (employed by DCJ) has been located in the SHS office. A mid-term review found the pilot was tracking well against its two objectives – improving access to housing products and providing a more seamless, integrated service. Clients felt better supported, were less likely to withdraw from the program, and were approved and assessed for housing support more quickly.^v

The Society is not only a significant provider of accommodation options, it is involved in various pilots and programs aimed at increasing housing options for those experiencing family and domestic violence. However, the Society is acutely aware of the significant unmet need that remains, of the piece-meal approach to housing which varies significantly across the country and of the short-term nature of funding for various pilots and programs.

What needs to be done at the Commonwealth level?

In July 2018, the Commonwealth entered into a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) with states and territories and committed \$1.56 billion each year over ten years to June 2029. This represented an inadequate and small percentage increase (1.88 per cent) from the 2018-19 annual allocation of \$1.53 billion.

State and territory governments were required to prioritise affordable and social housing and women and children affected by family and domestic violence.^{vi} It is well near impossible to access reports prepared by state and territory governments, with different reporting formats used and information buried in other sources, such as Budget papers. The data are not consistent or accessible and there appear to be few indicators that measure the extent to which need is being met (or otherwise). The Commonwealth was supposed to be developing a data improvement plan, through a housing and homelessness data working group but no information is readily available on where this is up to.

The Committee is referred to the Society's recent submission (No. 142) to the Inquiry into Homelessness which outlines the chronic shortage of community and social housing and the extent to which states and territories have fallen behind on being able to meet current demand, let alone future projections.

The Society calls on the Australian Government to make a significant investment towards increasing social and community housing to help meet current unmet demand, stimulate the economy and create jobs. A new national housing affordability and homelessness strategy,

informed by an expert advisory group comprising governments, housing and finance industries and NGOs, should be developed.

What is the future of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-22) (National Plan)?

To understand the relevant statistics and the extent to which performance indicators against the National Plan's National Outcomes have been met, the Society recommends that the Committee seek evidence from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Centre for Crime and Justice Statistics, responsible for criminal and court data publications and the Personal Safety Survey; and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, responsible for the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia publications. We offer a brief commentary below on some of the National Outcomes.

The National Plan has not reduced violence against women and their children

Although the National Plan has been in place for 12 years, statistics indicate that family and domestic violence against women and their children has not decreased and sexual assault has increased. However, violence within the community has decreased. (The rates of partner violence and sexual violence have remained stable since 2005 but total violence from any person has declined significantly over this period). Police recorded 25,000 victims of sexual assault in 2017—8% more than the 23,000 victims in 2016 and the highest number since the data series began in 2010.^{vii}

A more targeted approach is needed

A community-wide, broad brush approach, with some action items targeted at specific cohorts has not made any significant difference to the incidents or rates of family and domestic violence for these cohorts. This approach fails to recognise that some groups are more at risk than others, and there are specific life stages when violence is more likely to occur. Those at greater risk of family, domestic and sexual violence include Indigenous women, young women, pregnant women, women separating from their partners, women with disability and women experiencing financial hardship.

From the AIHW's 2019 *Family, domestic and sexual violence report*, we know that:

- Young women aged 18–34 were 2.7 times as likely as those aged 35 and over to have experienced intimate partner violence in the 12 months before the 2016 PSS (ABS 2018a)
- When compared with people without disability, people with disability were 1.8 times as likely to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a partner in the previous year, and 1.7 times as likely to have experienced sexual violence (including assault and threats) since the age of 15 (ABS 2018a).
- People living in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia are 1.5 times as likely to experience partner violence as those living in areas of least disadvantage (ABS 2018a).
- Indigenous adults were 32 times as likely to be hospitalised for family violence as non-Indigenous adults (AIHW analysis of National Hospital Morbidity Database).

We also know, from the same source, that older women and women living in regional locations are at risk of violence:

- In 2017–18, more than 10,900 calls were made to elder abuse helplines across Australia. Female victims outnumbered male victims in each state and the proportion of victims generally rose with age
- People living outside major cities were 1.4 times as likely to have experienced partner violence since the age of 15 as people living in Major cities (ABS 2018a). People in remote and very remote areas were 24 times as likely to be hospitalised for domestic violence as people in Major cities (AIHW analysis of National Hospital Morbidity Database).

People are still unwilling to get help or to contact police

National Outcome 5 of the National Plan is *Justice responses are effective*, with the performance indicator being 'an increase in the rate of women reporting violence'. These statistics have changed little over time. Almost half (46%, or 127,000) women and 7 in 10 (68%, or 102,000) men who experienced violence from a current partner did not seek advice or support. Eight in 10 (82%, or 226,000) women and more than 9 in 10 (97%, or 146,000) men who experienced violence from a current partner, never contacted the police.^{viii}

Only some community attitudes have changed

National Outcome 1 of the National Plan is Communities are safe and free from violence, with the performance indicator being 'an increase in the community's intolerance of violence against women'. While there have been some positive trends in the latest *National Community Attitudes Towards Violence against Women Survey (2017)*, young people still hold some disturbing views about consent and control.^{ix} Additionally, too many Australians are willing to excuse violence as part of a 'normal' gender dynamic in a relationship; and one in three Australians believe that if a woman does not leave her abusive partner then she is responsible for the violence continuing.^x

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women remain at greater risk.

National Outcome 3 of the National Plan is *Indigenous communities are strengthened*. Statistics indicate that family violence occurs at higher rates in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities than in the general population. In 2017, the majority of Indigenous assault victims recorded by police were victims of family violence, ranging from 64% (2,700) in New South Wales to 74% (3,900) in the Northern Territory. In 2016–17, Indigenous people were 32 times as likely to be hospitalised for family violence, compared with non-Indigenous people. In 2017–18, 16% (48,300) Indigenous children received child protection services.

Programs that empower communities to develop local solutions to local issues such as family violence are showing promising results.^{xi} The 2020 Closing the Gap includes a significant and sustained reduction in violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children towards zero (target 13), and a 45 percent reduction in the number Indigenous children in out-of-home care by 2031 (target 12). It aims to enable more community control, embed shared decision-making, build the community-controlled sector and improve mainstream services.^{xii} Significant additional funding and resources will be required to progress this work and it must be informed by the Coalition of Peaks.

The impact of violence on children and the lack of connectedness between the National Plan and National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (National Framework) (2009-2020)

The Society is particularly concerned about the negative impact of violence on the health and wellbeing of children, the interface between family violence and child protection and the long-term impact violence has on adult health and relationships (with many adults who were exposed to violence as children, much more likely to experience partner violence themselves).

From the AIHW's 2018 Family, domestic and sexual violence report, we know that:

- Women and men who experienced abuse or witnessed domestic violence as children (before the age of 15) are also at increased risk. Nearly 2.1 million women and men witnessed violence towards their mother by a partner, and nearly 820,000 witnessed violence towards their father, before the age of 15. People who, as children, witnessed partner violence against their parents were 2–4 times as likely to experience partner violence themselves (as adults) as people who had not (ABS 2017b)
- Several studies show that women who experience childhood abuse have worse physical and mental health in adulthood (Loxton et al. 2006).

From the AIHW's 2019 Family, domestic and sexual violence report, we know that:

- Around 2.5 million adults have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15. Many children have witnessed violence: 418,000 women and 92,200 men who had experienced violence from a previous partner said the children in their care had witnessed this violence (ABS 2017c)

Qualitative research has shown that children exposed to family, domestic and sexual violence can experience long-term effects on their development and have increased risk of mental health issues, and behavioural and learning difficulties.^{xiii}

A meta-synthesis conducted by the Institute for Child Protection Studies found that children experience domestic and family violence as a complex, isolating and enduring experience. For almost all children, the ongoing threat of violence and the controlling behaviours of perpetrators have a significant effect on their everyday lives and relationships. Even after mothers have separated from violent partners, children continue to feel a pervasive sense of fear, powerlessness, sadness, and sometimes anger. Children's significant relationships (with their family and friends) are restricted and

strained by domestic and family violence and they are often left attempting to survive and cope in isolation and silence.

Children engage in a range of strategies to protect themselves and their family members but have limited control over their environments and limited supports. To decrease their isolation, and to address the violence and sadness which exists in their lives, children stressed that they require:

- help to facilitate the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of themselves and their family
- opportunities to talk, be listened to and taken seriously
- to be included, informed and empowered, and
- to be assisted to build and enhance the significant relationships in their lives.

The important role of others in keeping children safe and attending to their emotional needs was evident.^{xiv}

A study of families in the child protection system experiencing domestic and family violence issues was conducted in Queensland to identify the appropriateness and effectiveness of service responses. It found that alcohol and drug use represented one of the highest family risk factors and that young parents (aged 14-19 years) were more likely to have domestic and family violence identified as a risk factor than older parents (aged 20 plus). Child-centred practice was essential to effectively discover the needs of children and young people, as well as some of the challenges in identifying and referring children, young people and families to suitable services to meet these needs. Enablers included information sharing and collaborative practice amongst all service providers. Barriers to child-centred practice were identified as poor communication (lack of information sharing), lack of specialist services, and a lack of experts for children and young people to work with in the statutory child protection system.^{xv}

The research points to the importance of child-centred practice and the strong interface that exists between family violence and child protection. However, this has not been fully explored from either a policy or funding perspective even though responsibility for the National Plan and the National Framework sat with the Commonwealth Department of Social Services. We believe that the National Plan and the National Framework should be merged into the one national policy, particularly given the siloed approach that has been taken to date with respect to the sharing of information, developing policies and building the evidence base.

Data

The Personal Safety Survey is a national quantitative survey conducted on a four-yearly basis. It is essential that this Survey continue and that it receive additional funding to increase the sample size to enable analysis by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD people, people living with disability and people living in regional Australia.

We also refer the Committee to recommendations made by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare on key data gaps.^{xvi} There is no publicly available information on what is being done by the Commonwealth Government to address these data gaps.

Building the evidence base – establishing a National Centre of Excellence

Significant Commonwealth government funding has gone into establishing Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), with much-needed research funds used to establish the governance and operational arrangements, employ staff and support the Board. Instead, a higher percentage of funds could go directly to research if a National Centre of Excellence was established. Such a model capitalises but does not replicate existing research facilities. An example is the ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course.^{xvii}

Policy responsibility – Department of Social Service and Prime Minister and Cabinet

It is difficult to understand where lines of policy responsibility for family violence fall as it currently straddles both the Department of Social Services and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Office for Women). We consider this adds an unnecessary level of complexity at the Commonwealth level, particularly when it comes to consulting with stakeholders and advocating to Ministers. The Office for Women was previously located in the Department of Social Services and we believe that it should be moved back there. The Minister's portfolio responsibilities are directly relevant to addressing family violence, namely overseeing Australian government social services, including mental health, families and children's policy, and support for carers and people with disabilities, and seniors.

National Plans versus other vehicles

Each of the states and territories have developed their own approaches to addressing family violence (usually through strategies) and have allocated different funding amounts to implement recommendations arising from Royal Commissions, Special Taskforces and other inquiries.^{xviii} The extent to which these strategies align with the National Plan is variable.

Any future arrangement requires improved coordination and information sharing between the states, territories and Commonwealth. Regular consultation with service providers should occur but this should not be limited to specialised family violence services (as many other mainstream services assist those experiencing family violence). Increased long-term Commonwealth funding is also required.

The new National Cabinet is an opportunity to streamline the policy and funding approach to family violence. The recently established Coalition of Peaks, established to develop Closing the Gap 2020, is an example of how policy development and planning can be done. Other approaches, such as implementing a National Partnership Agreement, could also be considered but would need comprehensive reporting requirements.

To conclude

In conclusion, the Society highlights the following matters:

- When National Outcomes under the National Plan are assessed, it is apparent that the incidents and rates of family and domestic violence against women and their children have not reduced over the years. Policy and service responses to family violence across the country remain fragmented and variable.
- A general, broad-brush community approach to addressing violence means that those cohorts who are at greater risk of violence continue to fall through the cracks.
- A targeted approach is needed to assist groups at risk of family violence namely young women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living in regional and remote communities, women living with disability, women experiencing financial hardship, pregnant women, women separating from their partners, women on temporary visas and older women.
- We believe that family violence cannot be addressed without addressing the significant gaps that currently exist at all stages of the housing continuum— from shelter/crisis accommodation, through to transition accommodation, supported accommodation and longer term community, social and affordable housing. The housing response across the states and territories is fragmented and adhoc in nature. Women escaping violence often have few resources and choices. They can end up in a continuous housing loop which involves sleeping rough/couch surfing, staying with friends and family, moving to crisis accommodation and back again; or returning to an unsafe home.
- Service responses must be adequately resourced so that they can be trauma-informed and child-centred in their approach.
- Protecting Australia's children should not be separated from policy responses aimed at reducing violence against women and their children. More work needs to be done on understanding the interface between child protection and family violence.
- More work needs to be done on addressing the attitudes of young people, particularly with respect to consent and control.
- More work needs to be done on understanding why people are reluctant to seek help.
- Coordination, information sharing, funding and consultation need to be improved between all levels of government and with service providers (including specialised family violence and mainstream services)
- Funding for the Personal Safety Survey needs to be increased to enable analysis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with disability and people living in regional and remote Australia
- The Coalition of Peaks should inform any future work on addressing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.

- The Office for Women should be re-located in the Department of Social Services and policy responsibility should rest with the one Department.
- A National Centre of Excellence should be established as a cost effective means of building the evidence base on what works to reduce violence against women and their children.

We thank you for the time you have given our submission. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Mr P Toby oConnor

Chief Executive Officer



Attachment A

Qld	<p>WOMEN'S REFUGES, CHILD AND FAMILY HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS</p> <p>There are four refuges located around Queensland for use by women and their children who are unable to stay at home because of domestic or family violence. These refuges are safe places that offer individualised support plans to empower women and their children to lead a life free of violence</p> <p>When staying at a refuge, residents are asked to contribute towards their accommodation based on their income. Weekly charges cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • temporary accommodation – mostly private but in some cases shared • working with support workers to plan, make positive changes and achieve goals • access to workshops on various life skills including social and emotional health, budgeting and parenting • referrals and support for services such as counselling, health, legal, and immigration services • support to find and access schools for children, and other child-related services • referrals and support specifically for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families • support to find permanent housing • Information on safety planning <p>Refuge services are accessed by calling DV Connect on 1800 811 811</p> <p>If able to plan ahead, collect as many personal identification and legal documents as possible including :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • driver Licence • passports, visas and work permits • centrelink details • birth certificates for the whole family • credit cards and bank information • mortgage or rental information • insurance documents • car registration documents • school and medical records • medication and prescriptions • current unpaid bills • address book, diary and keys to house, office and car. <p>It is recommended that personal items should also be brought, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clothing • jewellery • children's favourite toys • toiletries • photographs or small items of sentimental value. <p>Refuges are fully furnished so there is no need to bring any furniture or other household items. Unfortunately we are unable to take pets but this can be organised through the RSPCA Queensland's Pets in Crisis program by contacting DV Connect on 1800 811 811</p>
NSW	<p>The St Vincent de Paul Society provides assistance for victims of relationship violence within a framework that is always supportive of the choices women make, whether they decide to stay in the relationship or not. We aim to provide long-term support and friendship at what can be an extremely vulnerable time for women and children, helping them build new lives and move away from relationship violence if they choose to leave a violent relationship. In such cases, we can also provide short and long term accommodation to families and children experiencing or at risk of relationship violence.</p> <p>Our domestic violence services also provide support to men experiencing domestic violence and to people in LGBTQI relationships.</p>

	<p>Vinnies NSW violence support services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amelie House • Claffy Lodge • Dolores Refuge • Domestic Violence Rapid Crisis Response • Eden House • Elsie Women’s Refuge • Killara Refuge • Macarthur Case Management Services • Marian Centre • Marian Villa • Our Lady of the Way • Pathways, Southern Highlands • Rosalie House • South East Sydney Domestic Violence Response Enhancement service • Vinchez Refuge • Vinnies Homeless Services Deniliquin <p>For assistance line call 13 18 12.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="320 813 1390 1003"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Financial Year</th> <th rowspan="2">Number of clients assisted</th> <th rowspan="2">Number of clients accommodated</th> <th rowspan="2">Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</th> <th colspan="4">Residency Status</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Permanent Resident</th> <th>Citizen</th> <th>Asylum Seekers</th> <th>Temporary Visa</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2018 - 2019</td> <td>2472</td> <td>1715</td> <td>312 (13%)</td> <td>99</td> <td>1928</td> <td>13</td> <td>86</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019 - 2020</td> <td>2753</td> <td>2047</td> <td>292 (11%)</td> <td>109</td> <td>2147</td> <td>15</td> <td>95</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>There has been a 19 percent increase in the number of clients accommodated between 2018-19 and 2019-20 and there is an over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.</p>	Financial Year	Number of clients assisted	Number of clients accommodated	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Residency Status				Permanent Resident	Citizen	Asylum Seekers	Temporary Visa	2018 - 2019	2472	1715	312 (13%)	99	1928	13	86	2019 - 2020	2753	2047	292 (11%)	109	2147	15	95
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2018 - 2019	2472	1715	312 (13%)	99	1928	13	86																						
2019 - 2020	2753	2047	292 (11%)	109	2147	15	95																						
Vic	<p>VincentCare Vic provides refuge accommodation and information on future housing options, as well as referrals to specialised counselling, court support, and material and financial assistance.</p> <p>VincentCare’s Marian Community in Shepparton provides a 24/7 specialist family violence service to women and children experiencing family violence. Assisted 279 women and 373 children in 2018-19.</p> <p>Services and supports focus on a wrap-around model of care so that women and their children have the opportunity to make pathways out of violent relationships and can live safely and independently within the community.</p> <p>The service is primarily available in the City of Greater Shepparton, Moira and Strathbogie but provides an enhanced after hours crisis service response to family violence in an expanded area that includes Mitchell and Murrundindi, thus servicing an area from the Murray River in the north to Wallan in the south.</p> <p>Services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crisis accommodation • refuge accommodation/referrals/access • risk assessments • safety planning • Safe @ Home Program funding and support • information, advice and family violence education • emotional support • financial and material aid • court support • advocacy • transport • social engagement <p>Marian Community work with women and children from all walks of life, family violence does not discriminate. We are committed to the principles of social justice and aim to ensure that every individual is treated with dignity and respect regardless of their ability,</p>																												

	<p>cultural background, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation or religion. Family violence affects not only the victims themselves, but the children who witness it, extended families, friends, workplaces and ultimately the whole community.</p> <p>Olive's Place provide-high security refuge accommodation where women and children receive intensive support around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • risk assessment and safety planning • income establishment • material aid • school enrolment • emotional support • referrals for external counselling • advocacy • court support • support and advocacy with immigration issues • transport • community engagement • help to secure long term safe accommodation through transitional housing management and Office of Housing applications <p>Olive's Place received 2315 contacts in 2018-19 and assisted 72 people through 4522 bed nights. The service aims to assist women and their children to achieve the maximum level of self-reliance and independence. Olive's Place works with women who are experiencing extreme violence and have had to escape their current community for safety reasons. All referrals to Olive's Place must go through Safe Steps on 1800 015 188.</p> <p>Head Leasing program - VincentCare takes responsibility for leasing and subletting houses in the private rental market for women and their children escaping family violence (Rapid Housing Family Violence program).</p>
SA	<p>The Vinnies Women's Crisis Centre is a 20 room facility that is staffed 24 hours, every day of the year. The Vinnies Women's Crisis Centre is a unique model in crisis intervention. An innovative accommodation/services combination, it ensures women have support, safety and peace of mind for sound decision making within a calm, child friendly environment. Women, children and pets are welcome.</p> <p>Guests must be referred by government and agency channels, which include the domestic violence help line and the South Australian Police.</p> <p>Staff are trained community workers and compassionate to the emotional and practical needs of women experiencing crisis.</p> <p>The Vinnies Women's Crisis Centre provides all meals and serviced rooms, together with kitchen, laundry and computer facilities. A children's play room and manicured gardens complete the tranquil setting. Assistance with transport, childminding and other practical services are provided when possible, together with in-house access to St Vincent de Paul Society services, including clothing and other assistance.</p> <p>The Vinnies Women's Crisis Centre is managed by staff under the direction of the Chief Executive Officer. A committee oversees its operations. The Centre has an agreement with the Government of South Australia to provide emergency homelessness accommodation.</p> <p>In 2018-19, 634 women and 608 children were provided with the equivalent of 6,789 nights of accommodation. 122 pets were also looked after. Occupancy increased from 88% to 98% in 2018-19.</p>
ACT	<p>The St Vincent de Paul Society provides assistance for victims of relationship violence within a framework that is always supportive of the choices women make, whether they decide to stay in the relationship or not. The Society provides long-term support and friendship at what can be an extremely vulnerable time for women and children, helping them build new lives and move away from relationship violence if they choose to leave a violent relationship. In such cases, short and long term accommodation is provided to families and children experiencing or at risk of relationship violence.</p> <p>Services offered include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Parents Program - 87 people, 37% male and 63% female were assisted, through 25 stays or 4549 nights

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 96% are aged under 25, 24% are CALD, 11% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ● Family Services - 493 people, 44% male and 56% female were assisted, through 142 stays or 30,082 nights ○ 66% are aged under 25, 28% aged between 26-45, 6% aged over 45; 24% are CALD
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- ⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2019. *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story* 2019. Cat. no. FDV 3. Canberra: AIHW. Accessed at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia-2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>, p.35
- ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018*. Cat. no. FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW. Accessed at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/d1a8d479-a39a-48c1-bbe2-4b27c7a321e0/aihw-fdv-02.pdf.aspx?inline=true>, p.xi
- ^{iv} 4 in 5 (81%, or 319,000) of those women who temporarily left their most recent relationship stayed at a friend or relative's house. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia-2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>, p.13
- ^v Elton consulting. 2019. *Start Safely SHS Pilot Program: Mid-point review*. Department of Communities and Justice, 18 October 2019.
- ^{vi} Australian Government. Department of Social Services. 2019. National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Accessed at: <https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support-programs-services-homelessness/national-housing-and-homelessness-agreement>. Priority areas for housing include social housing, encouraging growth and supporting the viability of the community housing sector, tenancy reform, home ownership and planning and zoning reform initiatives. Priority cohorts for homelessness services include women and children affected by family and domestic violence, children and young people, Indigenous Australians, people experiencing repeat homelessness, people exiting from care or institutions into homelessness and older people.
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- ^{viii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia-2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>, p.18
- ^{ix} ANROWS. nd. *Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality: Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)*. Accessed at: <https://d2rn9qno7zhxgg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/05051725/2017-NCAS-Youth-report-stakeholder-kit-1.pdf>
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- ^{xv} Cahill, A., Stewart, J. & Higgins, D. (2020). *Service system responses to children and young people in the statutory child protection system who have experienced or witnessed family violence*. Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University. DOI: 10.26199/5e2fc4dd37b96. Accessed at: <https://www.acu.edu.au/-/media/feature/pagecontent/richtext/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/icps/docs/service-system-responses-in-statutory-child-protection-family-violence-feb2020.pdf?la=en&hash=43E90FEDE58C5838DDE52DFC889498CE>, pp7-8
- ^{xvi} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/d1a8d479-a39a-48c1-bbe2-4b27c7a321e0/aihw-fdv-02.pdf.aspx?inline=true>, p.108.
- ^{xvii} ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Lifecourse. Accessed at: <https://www.lifecoursecentre.org.au/>
- ^{xviii} For example, [Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change](#) (Committed \$2.7BN); [NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021](#) (\$390M over 4years), [Qld Domestic Violence and Prevention Strategy](#) (\$328.9M)