

Submission re Delivery of National Outcome 4 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children

My submission relates to the issue of the adequacy and quality of counselling provided, specifically re the **elimination of the Recontacts service**

For a small number of callers, their experience of extreme sexual assault or domestic violence, often in childhood and adolescence has led to significant trauma that requires a specific and dedicated support for the individuals to achieve a basic level of functioning. The recontacts service operated by Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia is designed to work specifically and intensively with this cohort on an individual basis as a first step to recovery in these severely traumatised victims and with the new model of service provision will no longer exist.

As with all trauma counselling services that work with those who have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence, there are clients who are experiencing trauma impacts and those who are experiencing complex trauma. Many from both groups will also present with co-morbidities, which means that our clients are often struggling with other impacts such as mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, homelessness, and isolation, related to the trauma caused by sexual assault or domestic violence.

Clients who are suffering from complex trauma have often experienced sexual assault in childhood and then experienced further violence, both sexual and domestic, in adolescence and adulthood. For these clients their stage of recovery at the time of contact means that accessing face-to-face counselling services is not currently within their capacity. Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia, in recognition of the specific needs of this client group, established the Recontacts line.

Where a client is assessed to be experiencing complex trauma they are referred to the Recontacts service. As a Recontact client, the counselling service is further tailored to their specific needs. It is noted that many of these clients often hold active suicidal ideation, and have regular engagement with mental health services and emergency services. Currently there are 600 clients engaged in the Recontacts service with approximately 200 of those being current regular callers.

There are two stages to help these women start their journey:

- developing their self soothing capacity – to regulate emotions and develop coping mechanisms to help establish fundamental behaviour patterns such as regular sleeping / eating / showering; and
- reducing physical chaos in their lives to bring routine, and consequently enable activities to be completed such as shopping / meeting appointments / budgeting / planning etc.

The new MHS contract eliminates the Recontacts service, which is a vital support for some of Australia's most violently treated and vulnerable citizens and I am deeply concerned that there is no provision in the new service to work with these people and help them to a place of safety

Thank you for considering my submission