

Interim report

1.1 On 26 June 2014, the Senate referred the following matters to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee for inquiry and report by 27 October 2014:

- (a) the prevalence and impact of domestic violence in Australia as it affects all Australians and, in particular, as it affects:
 - (i) women living with a disability, and
 - (ii) women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds;
- (b) the factors contributing to the present levels of domestic violence;
- (c) the adequacy of policy and community responses to domestic violence;
- (d) the effects of policy decisions regarding housing, legal services, and women's economic independence on the ability of women to escape domestic violence;
- (e) how the Federal Government can best support, contribute to and drive the social, cultural and behavioural shifts required to eliminate violence against women and their children; and
- (f) any other related matters.¹

Conduct of the inquiry

1.2 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* newspaper and on the committee's website. The committee invited submissions from individuals, organisations and government departments by 31 July 2014. However, it continued to accept submissions until the end of 2014.

1.3 To date the committee has received 163 public submissions as well as confidential submissions. A list of individuals and organisations which made public submissions, together with other information authorised for publication by the committee, is at Appendix 1.

1.4 The committee held public hearings in Melbourne on 12 September 2014; Canberra on 15 October 2014; Sydney on 4 November 2014; Melbourne on 5 November 2014; Brisbane on 6 November 2014; and Darwin on 10 March 2015. A list of the witnesses who gave evidence at the public hearings is available at Appendix 2.

1.5 Submissions, additional information and the Hansard transcripts of evidence may be accessed through the committee website at: www.aph.gov.au/senate_fpa.

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 37 – 26 June 2014, p. 1018.

Timeframe for the inquiry

1.6 During the course of the inquiry, it became evident to the committee that additional time was required to speak with more organisations in order to gather sufficient evidence for the final report. On 26 August 2014, the Senate agreed to extend the reporting date until 2 March 2015.² In order for the committee to conduct a hearing in Darwin, a further hearing in Canberra and finalise its report, the committee sought a further extension until 18 June 2015.³

The need for an interim report

1.7 While acknowledging the need for more time to hold additional hearings and draft the final report, the committee agreed that the importance of this issue and the upcoming 2015-16 federal government budget required a brief interim report summarising the directions and initial findings of the committee.

Overview

1.8 One in three Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and almost one in five have experienced sexual violence.⁴ A study of Victorian women demonstrated that domestic violence is the leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness in women aged between 15 and 44, and is responsible for more of the disease burden than many well-known risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity.⁵ The emotional and personal costs of domestic violence in our community are enormous. Violence affects the victims themselves, children who are exposed to violence, extended families, friends, work colleagues and the broader community.⁶

1.9 The committee acknowledges these emotional and personal costs as well as the enormous economic cost of domestic violence. A study commissioned by the commonwealth government notes that the yearly cost of domestic violence in Australia in 2008-09 was \$13.6 billion and the cost is increasing.⁷

1.10 The committee notes the commonwealth government has committed around \$200 million over eight years between 2009-2017 to support the implementation of the National Plan and the first two Action Plans, with the aim of achieving a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children.⁸

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 46 – 26 August 2014, p. 1283.

3 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 79 – 2 March 2015, p. 2203

4 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4906.0 - Personal Safety, Australia, 2012 (2013).

5 VicHealth, *Submission 53*, p. 4

6 *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, p. 1.

7 The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, *The Cost of Violence Against Women and Their Children* (2009), p. 4

8 Commonwealth Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, p. 1.

1.11 The committee is concerned about commonwealth government funding cuts to a broad range of services essential to supporting victims of domestic violence. These include over \$64 million in funding cuts to Australian legal services over four years,⁹ \$44 million in funding cuts to new shelters and emergency accommodation, \$21 million in cuts to housing and homelessness peak bodies, abolition of the National Rental Affordability Scheme and abolition of the National Housing Supply Council.¹⁰ The government has failed to guarantee funding under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness past 30 June 2015, placing crucial services at risk. There has been a \$240 million funding cut to the Department of Social Services grants program, which has affected the funding certainty of many frontline domestic violence organisations delivering crisis services and men's behaviour change programs.¹¹

1.12 While it is difficult to quantify the full impact of the discretionary grant cuts on domestic violence reform, the committee has heard that victims of domestic violence rely on many of the services provided with these funds.

Initial findings

1.13 The committee acknowledges that addressing domestic violence requires long term and coordinated effort by all levels of government in partnership with non-governmental organisations, service providers and the community.

National framework

1.14 Key to the coordination required by all levels of government has been the development of the national framework which is detailed in the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (National Plan). The Commonwealth has worked with state and territory governments to develop and deliver the National Plan which was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and released in February 2011.

1.15 The National Plan's overall aim is to change social attitudes about violence against women and their children to reduce domestic violence over the long term. The National Plan states that:

It is the first plan to coordinate action across jurisdictions. It is the first to focus strongly on prevention. It is the first to look to the long term, building respectful relationships and working to increase gender equality to prevent

9 See 'States and territories unite in fight against legal assistance funding cuts', ABC Online 7 March 2015 at www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-07/states-territories-unite-in-fight-against-legal-aid-funding-cuts/6287604 (accessed 13 March 2015).

10 St Vincent de Paul Society, 'Vinnies: Help us to cut homelessness, not homelessness funding', *Media Release*, 2 April 2014; and Samantha Donovan, 'Federal Government cuts funding for housing programs, shocking peak bodies', *ABC news online*, 23 December 2014.

11 Judith Ireland, 'Government funding cuts bite emergency relief services', *Sydney Morning Herald* 28 February 2015 at www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/government-funding-cuts-bite-emergency-relief-services-20150227-131gdn.html (accessed 13 March 2015).

violence from occurring in the first place. It is the first to focus on holding perpetrators accountable and encourage behaviour change.¹²

1.16 The National Plan sets out a 12-year framework from 2010 to 2022 to reduce domestic violence in Australia, driven by four three-year Action Plans with specific aims and outcomes.¹³

1.17 The committee heard that the development of the National Plan and its action plans are welcome as they provide an appropriate framework to address the problem of domestic violence and there was general acknowledgement that some progress has been made. However, the committee also heard a level of frustration at the slow rate of progress in some areas. A number of hearing witnesses noted they have seen no improvement in the capacity of services to support victims of domestic violence and no reduction in the number of women trying to access these services.¹⁴ One explanation is that the long term planning and effort required to implement the National Plan means the effects will take time to be visible to front line service providers.

1.18 The committee agrees that it is therefore important for governments to make greater efforts to engage and consult with front line services to draw on their expertise and advise them of progress in relation to the areas of focus identified in The National Plan and the three-year action plans.

1.19 The level of consultation undertaken with the sector to develop the National Plan was spoken of favourably to the committee. However, it appeared to the sector that the level of consultation was subsequently reduced for the development of the action plans. While initial effort to engage stakeholders is necessary to agree an appropriate framework, the committee believes that the long term nature of this issue means that extra effort needs to be taken by governments to maintain engagement and consultation with front line services in particular, and ensure reporting on progress is centrally available.¹⁵

Role of the Commonwealth

1.20 It was emphasised to the committee that the Commonwealth government should take a lead and/or coordinating role. As well as the National Plan, the Commonwealth was also involved in the establishment of the Foundation to Prevent

12 *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, Foreword.

13 *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, p. 12.

14 For example, see evidence given on the capacity of services by Beryl Women's Inc, *Committee Hansard*, pp 10-11; and Victoria Police, *Submission 92*, p. 9, which outlines the increase in reporting rates of domestic violence cases.

15 The committee acknowledges the availability quarterly eNewsletters on the National Plan on the DSS website with two currently available, October and December 2014: www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-newsletter2 (accessed 4 March 2015).

Violence Against Women and their Children,¹⁶ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety and National Services (ANROWS), as well as some initiatives such as 1800 RESPECT,¹⁷ The Line¹⁸ and DV-alert.¹⁹ Other areas where the Commonwealth is taking a lead and/or coordinating include data collection, prevention measures and the harmonisation of domestic violence orders across jurisdictions and these are outlined below.

Data

1.21 The committee was particularly interested to explore the data and services available for groups with compounding vulnerabilities including culturally and linguistically diverse people (CALD), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGTBI) individuals, as well as those with disabilities.

1.22 It was clear to the committee that improving data, particularly for vulnerable groups, is necessary for greater understanding and provision of appropriate services. The National Plan provides for the conduct of the Personal Safety Survey and the National Community Attitudes Survey on a four-year rolling basis as part of the actions to develop the evidence base. The committee notes that it received evidence criticising the adequacy of sampling sizes of particular subgroups within the community, such as women with a disability and Indigenous communities.

1.23 Throughout the inquiry the committee received evidence emphasising the lack of nationally consistent data available on the prevalence and impact of domestic violence. The need for effective data collection and research to improve the evidence base and determine appropriate policies to address domestic violence is strongly supported by the committee. This is another area of long term work with the National Data Collection and Reporting Framework in its preliminary stages and not due to be fully operational until 2022. The committee is supportive of the initiative to have nationally consistent data, however, the committee shares the concerns of witnesses that a lack of resources could, potentially, be a constraint on agencies ability to collect and collate data pursuant to the framework.

1.24 The establishment of ANROWS is a key initiative under the National Plan and the results and findings from ANROWS research program will make a significant contribution to filling gaps in knowledge and increasing the understanding of issues. However, in the committee's view, the fact that ANROWS only has funding until June

16 Now known as 'Our Watch'.

17 A national counselling helpline providing information and support: www.1800respect.org.au/ (accessed 24 September 2014)

18 An online campaign to promote respectful relationships to young Australians: <http://theline.org.au/> (accessed 24 September 2014).

19 Domestic violence response training: www.dvalert.org.au/About-Us (accessed 24 September 2014)

2016²⁰ is disappointing, particularly as this means that some projects in ANROWS current research round do not even have funding certainty for the entirety of a two-year project.

Prevention

1.25 The committee has found it useful to consider responses to domestic violence on a continuum from prevention and early intervention through to crisis and long term support, using a public health approach which has been adopted by many organisations working in the domestic violence sector.

1.26 It was clear to the committee that a national, coordinated approach to address this issue is required and it notes the Commonwealth has an ongoing role in terms of leadership and coordination, particularly in the area of primary prevention of violence. The committee notes the recent announcement that the Commonwealth Government will work with state and territory governments to deliver a jointly funded national awareness campaign to address domestic violence.²¹

1.27 It was emphasised to the committee that primary prevention requires a holistic and long term approach to change entrenched cultural attitudes and behaviours. A critical element of primary prevention is promoting gender equality and addressing gender stereotypes.

1.28 The importance of a variety of primary prevention strategies at different levels to reduce domestic violence was emphasised in evidence to the committee. The need to target prevention measures to vulnerable groups including CALD and ATSI communities as well as new and emerging communities and women with a disability was also emphasised.

1.29 It was stressed to the committee that investment in primary prevention measures cannot be at the cost of investment in early intervention and crisis support services. There must be a commitment from governments to provide adequate resources as demand for these services lifts following public awareness campaigns encouraging women to seek information or help, or after incidents of domestic violence are reported in the media.²²

1.30 Evidence given to the committee noted there are already significant increases in the number of women reporting domestic violence, possibly due to increasing awareness about women's rights to live free from violence.²³

20 Dr Mayet Costello, Research Manager, ANROWS, *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 1.

21 The Prime Minister, the Hon Tony Abbott MP, 'National awareness campaign to reduce violence against women and children', Media Release 4 March 2015 at www.pm.gov.au/media/2015-03-04/national-awareness-campaign-reduce-violence-against-women-and-children (accessed 12 March 2015).

22 Christopher Knaus, 'Domestic violence workers see spike in demand for services after Tara Costigan death', *Canberra Times*, 3 March 2015.

23 Victoria Police, *Submission 92*, pp 3-4.

1.31 The other important key to changing attitudes is working with young people and to this end the committee supports the respectful relationships programs around the country and the plan to incorporate respectful relationships education into the national curriculum.

Early Intervention

1.32 Primary prevention measures need to be supported by early intervention (or secondary prevention) programs which aim to help at risk individuals avoid domestic violence, or to help them get out of situations in which violence is escalating. These strategies are primarily the responsibility of the states and territories and are included in their respective plans to support the National Plan. These can include educational programs, training for professionals working in the sector and administering domestic violence screening as part of health services.

1.33 Early intervention strategies can also target individuals or population sub-groups who are showing early signs of violent behaviour to reduce the likelihood of them perpetrating acts of domestic violence. They can assist children to recover from traumatic events and there are culturally appropriate targeted programs to support Indigenous families build and strengthen relationships. There are also programs to prevent homelessness and support women to stay at home.

1.34 An improved emphasis on prevention and early intervention strategies will assist and eventually reduce the number of families who interact with the child protection, court, justice and emergency accommodation systems. The committee supports the use of early intervention programs to reduce the risk, escalation and severity of violence and its effects and encourages the provision of sustainable funding for early intervention initiatives.

Crisis support

1.35 A dominant theme during the inquiry has been the need for more effective coordination of organisations which deliver crisis response services, including government agencies, police forces, and support organisations. This approach can deliver the support a victim needs in a coordinated way rather than leaving it up to the victim to approach each agency individually. Evidence given by Australian of the year, Ms Rosie Batty, noted that better coordination and communication may have prevented the murder of her son Luke, by his father.²⁴

1.36 A number of jurisdictions are trialling programs aimed at better coordination between the agencies working on domestic violence. The committee also heard there are some networks in jurisdictions coordinating services because they recognise the value and benefits of this approach. While this is welcome it was clear to the committee that this approach is currently relying on the goodwill of stakeholders as it is not supported by legislation or adequate resources.

1.37 Of concern to the committee was the evidence indicating that the current system places the burden of responsibility of responding to the violence on the victim

24 Ms Rosie Batty, *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, pp 11-12.

rather than effectively holding the perpetrator accountable. The committee heard this process can leave victims emotionally and financially exhausted and no doubt contributes to some victims not taking appropriate action.

1.38 The committee sees making perpetrators more accountable as treating the problem at its cause and to this end adequately structured and resourced behaviour change programs need to be part of a coordinated response to domestic violence. The committee understands that further work is required around data collection to ensure evidence based perpetrator programs are offered. Current evidence shows that longer programs are more effective than shorter ones and that following the completion of a program, men require support to transition back to the environment which resulted in them choosing a violent response.

1.39 The committee heard evidence from the Northern Territory hearing and submissions of the link between alcohol and other drug (AOD) abuse and domestic and family violence.²⁵ The committee believes that it is important to develop a better understanding of these links and the best treatments for AOD abuse issues in relation to reducing domestic and family violence.

1.40 Another issue raised with the committee was that some family violence services receive funding through grants administered by the Department of Social Security (DSS).²⁶ The committee heard concerns from the sector about the uncertainty created by the transition to a new DSS grants process due to commence on 1 July 2015. For a number of months organisations have been waiting to hear about whether they will receive a grant and in the meantime their funding has been addressed by temporary funding announcements.²⁷

1.41 As part of this interim funding process, the committee notes the commonwealth government's decision to redirect \$17 million earmarked for relationship counselling vouchers into the funding extensions for these frontline social services pending the completion of the new tender process.²⁸

25 See, for example, Ms Melanie Warbrooke, Acting Managing Solicitor, Top End Women's Legal Service, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 5; Ms Regina Bennett, Coordinator, Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 13; Mr John Paterson, Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 18; Mr Bernard Dwyer, Chief Executive Officer, Amity Community Service, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, pp 26-27; Mr Peter Bravos, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Crime and Specialist Support Command, Northern Territory Police, *Proof Committee Hansard*, p 32, 34.

26 For an outline of this new grants process see the Department of Social Services, " Grant Programmes: New Department, new grant programmes" at www.dss.gov.au/grants/grant-programmes (accessed 2 March 2015).

27 The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Minister for Social Services, 'Morrison to fill critical front line service gaps in Social Service grants' *Media Release* 30 January 2015.

28 The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Minister for Social Services, 'Extra \$17m for frontline social services as Stranger Relationships trial ends', *Media release*, 1 February 2015.

1.42 However, the committee understands that beyond June 2015, DSS grants funding is very uncertain for many organisations including specialist family violence services, Indigenous family safety programs, and for men's behaviour change program providers.²⁹

1.43 This process has had a negative effect on the sector while organisations and individuals wait to hear whether their organisation and roles will still be funded through the new grants process. It has left organisations unable to plan effectively and resulted in the loss of experienced staff who are seeking more employment certainty.

Legal response

1.44 The committee understands that the legal frameworks dealing with domestic violence are complex and that domestic violence cases are mostly handled by state and territory legal systems. However, Commonwealth responsibilities include providing funding for legal services, oversight of the *Family Law Act 1975* and the Family Court system, and leading work to coordinate legal systems across jurisdictions.

1.45 The committee heard concerns about the reduction of funding for community legal centres. In particular, stakeholders commented on the 2013-14 Mid-Year Economic and Financial Outlook (MYEFO) measure 'Legal Policy Reform and Advocacy Funding — redirection', which cut \$43.1 million over the forward estimates to four legal assistance programs, including funding streams for community legal centres.³⁰

1.46 The redirection of funding for advocacy and law reform is particularly concerning, as it prevents small, frontline organisations informing law reform and policy development. The committee heard that this work is essential in seeking to identify and remedy systemic issues and improving the system for participants.

1.47 Moreover, the committee heard that cuts to advocacy and law reform funding translate, in practice, to cuts for frontline services for legal assistance being given to many victims of domestic violence.

1.48 In addition, the committee is deeply concerned that funding cuts to legal services will affect already disadvantaged groups. For example, of the \$43.1 million in cuts announced in the 2013-14 MYEFO, \$13.41 million has been taken away from the Indigenous Legal Aid and Policy Reform Program from 2013-14 to 2016-17.³¹ These cuts will have a devastating effect on Indigenous women suffering domestic violence who already face significant disadvantage.

29 See Mrs Jackie Brady, Executive Director, Family and Relationships Services Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 47; See Miki Perkins, 'Victorian family violence services face cuts', *The Age*, 26 January 2014.

30 *Mid-Year Economic and Financial Outlook 2013-14* (December 2013), p. 119.

31 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, *Factsheet: Funding Cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services* (2013) at www.natsils.org.au/portals/natsils/submission/Funding%20Cuts%20Factsheet%202%20April%202013.pdf (accessed 25 February 2015).

1.49 Stakeholders also expressed concern over the previous allocation of \$15.0 million to the sector which was withdrawn in the 2014-15 Commonwealth Budget.³² The committee heard that this further cut has compounded the difficult situation that many community legal centres already face and it has disrupted their ability to adequately plan and allocate resources.³³

1.50 The committee notes that the level of concern over these funding cuts has prompted all state and territory Attorneys-General to write to the federal Attorney-General asking that the cuts be reversed and that no further funding reductions be made as it would affect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the community. The federal Attorney-General has responded that he is considering the letter in the context of the upcoming federal budget.³⁴

1.51 Another important reform in the legal space is the harmonisation of the domestic violence order (DVO) system so that a protection order issued in one jurisdiction is automatically recognised in others.

1.52 The Commonwealth is committed to making DVOs consistent across jurisdictions as part of the National Plan's First Action Plan which called them an 'immediate national initiative'.³⁵ With no progress apparent, in late January 2015, the government announced the implementation of a 'National Domestic Violence Order Scheme' would be a priority for COAG in 2015.³⁶

1.53 While welcoming the renewed commitment by the commonwealth government to progress this issue, given the time elapsed since it was first announced, the committee urges all jurisdictions to work through COAG to have this framework in place as soon as possible.

1.54 The committee has also heard of the need for better training of magistrates, judges and court reporters across all legal systems responding to family and domestic

32 See the Budget measure "Legal Aid — withdrawal of additional funding" in the *Commonwealth Budget 2014-15, Budget Paper 2: Expense Measures*, p. 60.

33 Christopher Knaus, 'Vulnerable Canberra Women turned away from legal services and refuge as funds dry up' *Canberra Times*, 4 March 2015.

34 Naomi Woodley, Lisa Mosley and Anna Henderson, 'States and territories unite in fight against legal assistance funding cuts', *ABC News online*, 7 March 2015. The committee also notes evidence from the 10 March 2015 Darwin hearing indicating that in addition to the cuts, the way funding through the Attorney-General's Department is distributed in the Northern Territory will change, which is causing further uncertainty, see Ms Melanie Warbrooke, Acting Managing Solicitor, Top End Women's Legal Service, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, pp 2-3. See also tabled document 10, tabled 10 March 2015 by Law Society of NT available from: www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Domestic_Violence/Additional_Documents.

35 *National Implementation Plan for the First Action Plan 2010-2013: Building a Strong Foundation* (2012), p. 23, 29.

36 The Hon Tony Abbott MP, 'COAG agenda to address ending violence against women', *Media release*, 28 January 2015.

violence cases, and the availability of legal aid to clients to challenge family reports, which may inaccurately reflect situations involving domestic violence.

Long term support

1.55 Victims of domestic violence have an ongoing need for support as they work to re-establish their lives, far beyond the immediate point at which violence occurs. Many victims live precariously for a long period of time after the initial crisis as they, and their children, struggle to manage emotionally and financially.

1.56 Access to safe and affordable long term accommodation in these circumstances is critical. Without access to this accommodation a victim of domestic violence potentially faces the choice between homelessness or returning to a violent partner. Given the importance of being able to access affordable housing, the committee is concerned that the commonwealth government is cutting funding to affordable housing policies.

1.57 In the 2014-15 Budget, the government announced that it is not proceeding with the next round of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). NRAS was identified in the National Plan as one way in which the Commonwealth would be working together with the states and territories to increase the supply of affordable housing.

1.58 In addition to the defunding of NRAS, the commonwealth government announced in the 2014-15 Budget that it would only be funding the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) until the end of June 2015. The Second Action Plan stated that:

Under the 2013-14 [NPAH], 180 homelessness initiatives receive[d] funding to assist both those who are homeless and those at risk of homelessness across Australia. Of [those] 180 homelessness initiatives, 39 contribute to support services for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence....

The 2014-15 NPAH will give the Government time to look at what improvements can be made to more effectively response to the causes of homelessness and achieve lasting reductions in the number of homeless Australians.³⁷

1.59 Evidence to the committee referred to initiatives funded under the NPAH, such as the 'Safe at Home' program, which supports women and children to remain in their own homes.³⁸ While the extension of NPAH for a further 12 months was welcomed, it was noted that the confirmation of just one year of funding will create uncertainty.³⁹

37 *Second Action Plan 2013-16*, p. 12.

38 Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Submission 50*, p. 27.

39 See for example National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum, *Submission 51*, p. 22.

1.60 The committee also notes the \$44 million cut to capital expenditure on new shelters and emergency accommodation under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness announced in the May 2014 budget⁴⁰ as well as the December 2014 announcement cutting \$21 million over four years from housing and homelessness peak bodies⁴¹ which will affect accommodation available for victims of domestic violence.

1.61 The effects of these cuts are being compounded by funding reforms to the homelessness sector in states such as NSW, which have reduced the number of specialist services available for victims of domestic violence.⁴²

1.62 Aside from affordable accommodation, the committee heard evidence that current support services are focussed on crisis:

Once the immediate crisis is over, women need support with education and training to be able to enter employment. They also need support with parenting, access to health and wellbeing programs and therapeutic support. Due to resource constraints services must cease support when families are 'stable' and often this is when families need support the most. This contributes to the 'revolving door' which is far less cost effective than providing the appropriate support to a family.⁴³

1.63 The committee was also provided with research that the cost of providing episodic crisis support – currently a woman enters the system seven times on average – is almost double the cost of a woman entering the system once and having both immediate needs met and long-term support available.⁴⁴

1.64 The importance of a victim of domestic violence being able to maintain their employment was highlighted as a key factor in that person being financially stable in the long term. On this point the committee was pleased to hear of the uptake of domestic violence leave provisions in enterprise agreements and the personal stories of how this type of leave has assisted victims to re-establish their lives and maintain financial independence.⁴⁵

40 St Vincent de Paul Society, 'Vinnies: Help us to cut homelessness, not homelessness funding', *Media Release*, 2 April 2014.

41 Samantha Donovan, 'Federal Government cuts funding for housing programs, shocking peak bodies', *ABC news online*, 23 December 2014.

42 Jess Hill and Hagar Cohen, 'How funding changes in NSW locked women out of domestic violence refuges', *The Guardian*, 9 March 2015.

43 Victorian Statewide Children's Resource Program, *Submission 13*, p. 3.

44 Ms Julie Oberin, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 27.

45 See for example Ms Veronica Black, Finance Sector Union of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, pp 49-50.

Committee view

1.65 The committee acknowledges that addressing domestic violence is an issue which requires long term commitment from governments, stakeholders and the broader community. With the appointment of Ms Rosie Batty as Australian of the Year, there is a renewed focus on the actions and resources required to address this issue.

1.66 The committee was heartened by the high level of goodwill by all stakeholders in the area to achieve real progress and particularly the willingness of many on the service front line to tirelessly go above and beyond to assist those in need.

1.67 The committee was particularly concerned to hear that the federal funding cuts to services outlined above are already affecting the ability of stakeholders to assist those in need. This outcome is contrary to the public statements made by the federal government and the committee considers that in order to achieve real progress in this area, the commonwealth government must restore the funding cuts it has made to date and end funding uncertainty for crucial services.

1.68 The committee notes recent calls for a national crisis summit on family violence for governments to discuss coordinated judicial and social services reforms within their areas of responsibility. The committee supports recent proposals to reverse funding cuts to domestic violence services⁴⁶ and increase funding to frontline legal services, programs to help women stay at home and programs to increase information sharing between agencies.⁴⁷

1.69 The committee welcomes the current momentum and significant effort occurring to address domestic violence. This includes the work by governments and stakeholders to progress the objectives of the National Plan and its actions plans, as well as jurisdiction-specific work such as the recent report by the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland chaired by the Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO and the Victorian Royal Commission into Domestic Violence. Using this work to inform all jurisdictions of effective reforms, ensuring coordinated action, and the provision of adequate resources will be key to achieving real progress in addressing domestic violence.

46 Stephanie Anderson, 'Budget hurting domestic violence victims, Senator Says', SBS Online 6 November 2014, available at: <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/10/23/budget-cuts-hurting-domestic-violence-victims-senator-says>. See also Senator Larissa Waters, 'Senate demands Abbott Government reverse funding cuts to domestic violence services', Media release, 12 February 2015, available at: <http://larissa-waters.greensmps.org.au/content/media-releases/senate-demands-abbott-government-reverse-funding-cuts-domestic-violence-servi>.

47 ABC News online, 'Bill Shorten calls for Tony Abbott to hold national crisis summit to tackle violence against women', 4 March 2015. See also 'National Crisis Summit on Family Violence' www.alp.org.au/familyviolence?utm_campaign=famviolence&utm_medium=email&utm_source=australianlaborparty and <http://www.alp.org.au/nationalcrisissummit> (accessed 5 March 2015)

Recommendation 1

1.70 The committee recommends the Commonwealth Government restore funding cuts from legal services, housing and homelessness services and the Department of Social Services grants program, and guarantee funding under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness for at least four years.

Recommendation 2

1.71 The committee supports the Productivity Commission recommendation⁴⁸ that Australian, State and Territory governments should provide an immediate funding boost to legal assistance services of \$200 million to address pressing gaps in services.

Recommendation 3

1.72 The committee recommends all Australian governments work together with stakeholders, including front line services and peak advocacy groups, to develop a program to increase the capacity of services in the areas of prevention, early intervention and crisis support in accordance with the objectives of the National Plan and the Action Plans.

Recommendation 4

1.73 The committee recommends the Commonwealth Government supports increased coordination and communication between legal systems across jurisdictions.

Recommendation 5

1.74 The committee recommends the Commonwealth Government support and expedite the harmonisation of intervention orders across jurisdictions. The Commonwealth Government should also identify opportunities to share information between agencies in order to address increasingly violent behaviour by perpetrators and assist at risk individuals.

Recommendation 6

1.75 The committee supports the inclusion of respectful relationships education in the national curriculum.

Recommendation 7

1.76 The committee recommends increasing the availability of behavioural change programs for perpetrators and ensuring programs are evidence based.

Recommendation 8

1.77 The committee recommends the Commonwealth Government provide funding certainty to Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's

48 Productivity Commission, *Access to Justice Arrangements – Productivity Commission Inquiry Report Overview* (2014), p. 62

Safety and National Services beyond 2016 to support the completion of longer term research programs.

Recommendation 9

1.78 The committee recommends a review of policies and services dedicated to the treatment of alcohol and other drug abuse in the Northern Territory and their impact on domestic violence, including urgent consideration to reinstate the Banned Drinkers Register.

Senator Kate Lundy

Chair

