

# Chapter 10

## Support services

10.1 This chapter considers the importance of providing adequate long-term support for victims of domestic violence, beyond the immediate crisis response services discussed in chapter 8. The committee heard there is a need to provide 'maintenance and stability' for victims through 'wraparound services'. Witnesses also highlighted that wraparound services should include appropriate financial and trauma counselling for victims and their families as well as addressing longer-term housing needs.

### The need for long term support

10.2 A number of submissions emphasised the need for long term support for victims and their families to avoid crisis support services becoming a 'revolving door'.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Victorian State-wide Children's Resource Program argued:

Support for families should not be episodic; rather families who have experienced family violence require long term support. Current support is focussed on crisis, and resource constraints mean that often the more high risk cases receive support. 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.<sup>2</sup>

10.3 Women's Health in the South East supported this view:

Crisis support services are not adequately funded and are over capacity which results in women entering a 'revolving door,' being provided with the bare minimum support rather than a holistic wraparound approach which is needed.<sup>3</sup>

10.4 Ms Mirjana Wilson, Executive Director, Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS), emphasised the importance of giving victims 'maintenance and security' over the long-term, which would help them avoid needing crisis services again:

...I worry that we are not looking out for [victims of domestic violence] for a long enough period. That is where programs or services must look at the

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1 See Ms Mirjana Wilson, Domestic Violence Crisis Service, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 2; Women's Health West, *Submission 21*, p. 20; Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria), *Submission 115*, p. 15; Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, *Submission 123*, Attachment 1 (*Victorian Homelessness Action Plan [2012]*), p. 7; Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 124*, p. 14.

2 *Submission 13*, p. 3.

3 *Submission 61*, p. 5.

broad spectrum. There are different stages, and you need to do prevention, early intervention and crisis response. Then there is also maintenance and stability. It is the maintenance and stability that, if not well resourced, funded and looked out for, will tip people back into crisis.<sup>4</sup>

10.5 Ms Wilson described how the issues faced by victims can compound over time if they do not receive long-term support and how this can lead to victims re-entering crisis services or becoming homeless:

[Victims are often] left to cope with everything, including the financial stuff. The mortgage may or may not be getting paid, the private rent may or may not be getting paid, particularly if [a perpetrator] chooses not to do that once he has been removed. The children [are] traumatised and she is unable to work and sustain her employment, if that is what she had. Her employer may or may not understand her circumstances and there may be ongoing mental and physical health issues, depending on whether there are injuries or ongoing mental health associated with that. So what we know and what we have found is that women will stay and try to manage all of these things, living alone with the children. About nine months down the track, she cannot then sustain it and either returns to the violent relationship or tips into secondary homelessness, at which point the domestic violence is seen to be in the distant past and is no longer a reason for her homelessness.<sup>5</sup>

10.6 Ms Julie Oberin, Chairperson, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA), commented there was a need to integrate the immediate crisis response with longer-term support services, citing recent research:

...[showing] the best outcomes occur when women and children have their immediate needs met and where there is long-term support available. [This research calls] for three things. Immediate refuge accommodation for all women and children. At the moment, 60 per cent on any given day are turned away from refuge or emergency accommodation. The second thing they ask for is secure long-term housing, and the third is ongoing outreach support over 12 months, which will increase the safer and better outcomes for those women and children, decrease the risk and decrease the recurrence of the violence happening.<sup>6</sup>

10.7 Ms Oberin noted this model would not only deliver more effective outcomes than the 'crisis-driven model' currently being used, it would halve the cost for government:

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4 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 2.

5 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, pp 4-5.

6 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 27. Ms Oberin was referring to Northern Integrated Family Violence Services research conducted by Dr Kristin Diemer into the cost of supporting a woman experiencing family violence in the northern metropolitan region. See *Launch of Fund the Family Violence System Factsheet* available at <http://nepcp.org.au/news-and-events/launch-fund-family-violence-system-factsheet-northern-integrated-family-violence-ser> (accessed 17 April 2015).

[The research] found that currently women enter the system seven times and it costs \$53,279.07 per woman. They often return to a violent partner due to no affordable or safe housing being available and insufficient supports being available. [The research is] arguing that a best practice model would see that woman entering the system once, costing \$29,825.56, and being able to access safe and affordable housing. Also as part of the costing, if the system is working properly it will reduce refuge stay to 14 days rather than the current average of about three months. There are no exit points from refuge. That is why 60 per cent on any given day are being turned away.<sup>7</sup>

### **Wraparound services**

10.8 The committee heard how 'wraparound' support could provide an enhanced model of services for victims and their families, which would give them 'maintenance and stability' as they rebuilt their lives following violent episodes.<sup>8</sup>

10.9 Ms Marcia Williams, Chair, ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council (ACT DVPC), highlighted that services are being overwhelmed simply by meeting the immediate needs of victims and they are often not able to offer longer term wraparound assistance.<sup>9</sup>

10.10 The committee notes that the Second Action Plan's National Priority 3 – 'Supporting innovative services and integrated systems' recognises the importance of delivering wraparound support, and outlines the types of services for victims and their families that would be strengthened under the second phase of the National Plan:

Effective wrap-around support to women and their children who experience, or are at risk of violence is also very important. This means ensuring collaboration between the police, domestic and family violence and sexual assault services, housing and homelessness services, child protection, health and mental health services, income support and financial management support (such as income management), perpetrator interventions and programmes and, where necessary, cultural support services.<sup>10</sup>

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7 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 27.

8 See Ms Marcia Williams, ACT DVPC, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 3; Ms Mirjana Wilson, DVCS, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 4; Ms Julie Oberin, AWAVA, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2015, p. 28; National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum, *Submission 51*, p. 5; Women's Health in the South-East, *Submission 61*, p. 5; Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service, *Submission 109*, p. 7.

9 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 4.

10 This is drawn from actions to be taken under National Priority 3, Action 14 - Strengthening systems and service integration. See Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 5 (Second Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children), p. 29.

### ***Financial counselling***

10.11 The committee received evidence about how domestic and family violence often affects a victim's financial security.<sup>11</sup> Ms Marcia Williams, Chair, ACT DVPC, highlighted how victims of domestic and family violence often need help managing their finances after leaving abusive relationships:

More and more we are seeing women in poverty in the ACT, and the majority of those are around domestic violence. Financial counselling is another aspect. When they have been in these situations, often they do not know how to manage money and they do not have access to money. They really need a lot of support around getting out of the debts that are often incurred in their own names but on behalf of their partners.<sup>12</sup>

10.12 Ms Williams emphasised that many victims could easily slip into crisis housing or homelessness because of financial pressures, regardless of whether they had stayed in their own home or were in a rental property:

[The ACT DVCS] that looked at the women who they had been seeing over a number of years that had stayed in their own homes. The same thing is true of those who went into rental homes after exiting crisis support or straight into it. 54.6 per cent of the homeowners and 62.5 per cent of the families in private rentals lost their home after 12 months because they did not have that financial support to maintain them. So we are just causing the next lot of homelessness because we don't have programs in place that support their financial sustainability...Many women are finding that their finances are so tied up and it is such a long time to work through those things—whether it is a housing issue, or whether it is bills of the sorts of debts that are incurred often on behalf of the men—it is causing a whole lot of financial issues that are causing them into homelessness when they have previously not been.<sup>13</sup>

10.13 WIRE Women's Information submitted financial counselling services should be integrated with other services for victims of domestic and family violence who were remaining in their own home, as research showed:

...the importance of legal advice and support around property matters in achieving optimum financial outcomes for women. Policy reform which allows access to this advice through Legal Aid and community legal services for women who have a history of financial abuse would have a significant impact on their financial situation.<sup>14</sup>

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11 These issues have been discussed in this report in chapter 2 (financial effects of domestic violence) and chapter 5 (employers providing leave following incidents of domestic violence).

12 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 4.

13 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 4. Ms Williams was referring to a study undertaken by Jo Watson, *Staying at home after domestic violence*, ACTDVCS (2014).

14 *Submission 40*, p. 16.

### *Trauma counselling for victims and their families*

10.14 Witnesses highlighted the need for victims of domestic and family violence to be given adequate trauma counselling, not only following violent events, but also over the longer term.<sup>15</sup>

10.15 Ms Marcia Williams, in her capacity as Executive Director, Women's Centre for Health Matters, highlighted that recent cuts to services had reduced the amount of ongoing support available for victims of domestic violence, including trauma counselling:

...one of the things that we really find in the ACT for the really complex cases for women with mental health issues from long-term trauma is things like the day refuges that were provided by services like Inanna, as well as others that have now disappeared. So they are not getting that ongoing support, some of that counselling and some of those linkages and social interactions. A lot of those sorts of things are not being delivered because the cuts have cut those out.<sup>16</sup>

10.16 Mr John Paterson, Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), told the committee there was a particular lack of counselling services in remote and regional communities in the Northern Territory:

Experiences of violence are traumatic, and unresolved trauma can compound, with effects accumulating with impacts on individuals, families, and the broader community and society. Currently in the Northern Territory there is little to no support available to individuals suffering high levels of loss and grief. Mental health and counselling services are overstretched or unavailable, especially in remote areas. The inadequacy or lack of appropriate services to deal with family violence and related issues, particularly in remote areas, is one of the most pressing issues.<sup>17</sup>

### *Counselling for children*

10.17 The committee received evidence there needs to be greater attention given to providing support to children who have witnessed domestic violence, as they are at increased risk of suffering developmental, behavioural and mental health issues later in life, as well as having a higher risk of suffering or perpetrating domestic and family violence themselves.<sup>18</sup>

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15 See for example: One in Three Campaign, *Submission 23*, pp 20-21; Dr Deborah Walsh, *Submission 25*, p. 2; McAuley Community Services for Women, *Submission 30*, p. 4.

16 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 11.

17 *Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 17. The need for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trauma counsellors to be trained was also highlighted by Phoenix House, *Submission 1*, p. 39.

18 For example: Coalition of Women's Domestic Violence Services of South Australia, *Submission 38*, p. 5; Ms Rosie Batty, *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, pp 12-13, p. 15; Ms McCormack, DV Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, p. 18.

10.18 SunnyKids submitted that 75 per cent of the victims from domestic and family violence are children and therefore:

In the absence of readily available, targeted support for child victims, levels will remain unacceptably high and will continue to transfer from generation to generation.<sup>19</sup>

10.19 Ms Chrystina Stanford, Chief Executive Officer, Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, highlighted the potential effects of the current shortage of services for children, including counselling:

...the lack of support and appropriate specialist services for children who are living in domestic violence creates a vulnerability that can mean a child will go on to experience sexual assault and domestic violence across their whole lifetime.<sup>20</sup>

10.20 McAuley Community Services for Women stressed that children affected by domestic and family violence need to access counselling separately from their parents:

They may require individual counselling, group therapy or other evidence-based interventions to rebuild relationships but also to prevent future vulnerability to youth homelessness and/or becoming victims or perpetrators of violence themselves.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Specialised services***

10.21 The committee was interested in innovative models that deliver specialised services to address the needs of victims of domestic and family violence from particular communities.

10.22 Regarding victims from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, the inTouch Multicultural Centre against Family Violence (inTouch) outlined a model it developed to deliver services to victims of domestic and family violence from multicultural communities:

We developed it around five main headings: family violence in CALD communities, barriers to legal services, support for CALD children experiencing family violence, access and equity for women without permanent residency, and tailored responses versus the one-size-fits-all approach.<sup>22</sup>

10.23 InTouch noted that mainstream services could 'provide only superficial response to diverse communities' and highlighted the value of tailored service provision models:

Responses that will have long-term sustainable outcomes for CALD communities have to be designed based on a needs analysis and extensive

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19 *Submission 2*, p. 2.

20 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 2.

21 *Submission 30*, p. 5.

22 *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 23.

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community engagement. While this approach seems to be resource intense, high initial investment prevents clients from re-entering the system and ensures long-term sustainability.<sup>23</sup>

10.24 The committee also heard there is a need to foster specialised services for LGBTI victims of domestic violence, as they face social and cultural issues that could not be fully addressed by mainstream services. Mr Daniel Stubbs, Director, Inner City Legal Centre, commented that:

We also need a range of recovery programs for people who are experiencing domestic violence. It is important that they are targeted for LGBTI people. Just like you would not put a gay perpetrator in a program for straight perpetrators—I do not think that would be appropriate—there are also a whole lot of issues where you might run group therapy work for only gay or lesbian people or transgender men and women. We think that is really important too.<sup>24</sup>

10.25 Mr Alan Brotherton, Aids Council of New South Wales, noted that mainstream services could not always address the needs of communities, including LGBTI individuals. Among other example, he highlighted the lack of specialist services for elderly LGBTI Australians:

It would be fair to say that we have not had sufficient experience of specialist services that meet the needs of the elderly LGBTI people, to know what it is that works and works well and to be able to incorporate that into a mainstream service. That is taking the optimistic view that you can incorporate those into a mainstream service.<sup>25</sup>

10.26 Ms Keran Howe, Executive Director, Woman with Disabilities Victoria, highlighted to the committee that mainstream services should play a central role for victims of domestic violence, but that specialised services should cater for particular groups:

Our view in general is that mainstream domestic violence services and sexual assault services should have carriage of the issue, but there do need to be tailored responses for groups that have particular needs. We also need to draw on the expertise of different areas as the need arises.<sup>26</sup>

10.27 Ms Howe drew the committee's attention to some programs delivering services that played an essential role in supporting women with disabilities who had experienced domestic and family violence:

We have identified examples of specialist work, such as a referral program from the Independent Third Person, where we do need additional resources. Making Rights Reality is another program in Victoria where there is a specialised sexual assault response to women with cognitive disabilities or

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23 InTouch Multicultural Centre against Family Violence, *Submission 138*, p. 3.

24 *Submission 75*, p. 3.

25 *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 37.

26 *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 35.

women with communication difficulties. They have had more tailored case management from both legal advisers and counsellor advocates in the sexual assault services, and this has been found to be more effective in getting women to the court at all, let alone having successful prosecutions.<sup>27</sup>

## **Housing**

10.28 Throughout the inquiry, the availability of housing was raised as a critical issue affecting victims of domestic violence, whether they chose to leave the family home or remain in the house.

### ***The importance of affordable and suitable housing***

10.29 DV Victoria outlined the central role that affordable housing can play in helping victims to leave abusive relationships and get their lives back on track over the longer term:

For women and children leaving violence within their homes, access to affordable housing, including public and social housing, is critical to their being able to re-establish lives post violence...The availability of appropriate accommodation is a central factor in many women's decisions about whether or not to leave a violent situation, particularly the cost of alternative accommodation, safety, location and tenure.<sup>28</sup>

10.30 YMCA Australia described the 'vicious cycle' that was created by the lack of affordable housing:

The combination of a lack of housing affordability and violence against women forms a vicious cycle. The lack of appropriate affordable housing decreases the likelihood of women successfully leaving violent relationships and contributes to the high levels of homelessness among women who have experienced violence. The struggle to find suitable accommodation impacts on the health and wellbeing of women and children already dealing with health and trauma issues arising from violence.<sup>29</sup>

10.31 Ms Fiona McCormack, Chief Executive Officer, Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Victoria), observed that women in violent situations sometimes do not have the financial means to live independently, due to the high cost of accommodation.<sup>30</sup>

10.32 Even victims who remain in their own home after separation from an abusive partner face significant financial pressures, as Women's Legal Services Inc. (Queensland) described:

Remaining in the private rental or mortgaged family home may not be sustainable as women simply cannot afford the rental / mortgage payments. Remaining in the family home may be unsafe, due to the perpetrator's

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27 *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 35.

28 *Submission 124*, p. 17.

29 *Submission 49*, p. 5.

30 *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, p. 19.

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knowledge of the location and the property itself. Invariably domestic violence, along with all relationship breakdowns increases the demand for affordable accommodation for single parent families.<sup>31</sup>

10.33 The committee heard that the lack of affordable longer-term housing options for victims of domestic and family violence means women and their children need to remain in crisis accommodation for a much longer period which in turn results in the lack of availability of crisis accommodation. Ms Angela Lynch, Community Legal Education Lawyer, Women's Legal Service, confirmed that women are remaining in refuges for long periods of time as there are no other accommodation options.<sup>32</sup>

10.34 Ms Rosie Batty pointed out that where there is a wait to get into a refuge, rather than turn people away, some women are put up in a motel, the cost of which is absorbed by that crisis refuge service. She also spoke about purpose built refuges she visited in Adelaide where women are safe and there is a specialised response, in contrast to other models of crisis accommodation where victims of domestic and family violence can find themselves alongside people who are homeless for a variety of other reasons.<sup>33</sup>

10.35 The Office of the Public Advocate submitted that women with disabilities faced particular difficulties in finding appropriate longer term accommodation if they could not stay in their own home:

Finding suitable housing was difficult for some women, particularly if a woman's disability did not exactly fit into service criteria and requirements. The lack of alternative and appropriate accommodation was problematic for both shorter-term crisis situations and longer-term/permanent housing. Most Victorian crisis refuges and transitional accommodation are not built according to universal design standards and are therefore inaccessible to some women with disabilities. This highlighted the importance of Safe at Home programs that support women to remain in their own homes.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Relevant Commonwealth programs***

10.36 The Commonwealth has a number of programs relating to homelessness and housing affordability that are relevant to domestic and family violence issues. The committee heard that, since the launch of the National Plan in 2010, some of these programs have faced budget cuts and funding uncertainty.

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31 *Submission 108*, p. 15.

32 *Committee Hansard*, 6 November 2014, p. 5; See also Women's Legal Service Inc. (Queensland), *Submission 108*, p. 16.

33 Ms Rosie Batty, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 11 June 2015, p. 5.

34 *Submission 27*, Attachment 1, p. 18. See also Dr Jessica Cadwallader, Advocacy Project Manager, Violence Prevention, Australian Cross Disability Alliance, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 11 June 2015, p. 13.

10.37 Recognising homelessness as a key issue for victims of domestic violence, the National Plan stated the Commonwealth would work in conjunction with states and territories to:

- increase spending on homelessness services by 55 per cent as a substantial initial investment on a 12-year reform agenda;
- increase the supply of affordable housing through the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) and the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan;
- provide additional emergency relief and financial counselling services until mid-2011 to support Australians through difficult times; and
- fund 41 specialist homelessness projects across our housing programs, to provide more than 1680 new units of accommodation.<sup>35</sup>

10.38 The Commonwealth has a framework to address homelessness with the states and territories, the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). The National Plan states that:

Under the 2013-14 National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), around 180 homelessness initiatives receive funding to assist both those who are homeless and those at risk of homelessness across Australia. Of these 180 homelessness initiatives, 39 contribute to support services for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.<sup>36</sup>

10.39 However, since the launch of the National Plan in 2010 there have been changes to government funding for the housing and homelessness sector, including funding arrangements for NPAH and the cessation of NRAS, which will be discussed in turn.

### ***Funding uncertainty for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness***

10.40 NPAH was originally a four-year program running from 2009 to 2013. It was extended by one year in both the 2013-14 and 2014-15 Commonwealth Budgets and further extended from 2015 to 2017 on 23 March 2015.<sup>37</sup>

10.41 Before this extension had been announced, many submissions to this inquiry expressed dismay that the NPAH was due to expire on 30 June 2015.<sup>38</sup> For example,

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35 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 8.

36 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 12.

37 Minister for Social Services, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, 'Coalition reverses Labor's funding cuts on homelessness with \$230 million commitment prioritising victims of domestic violence', Media Release, 23 March 2015.

38 For example, see: Ms Jill Kelly, Inanna Inc. and Ms Marcia Williams, ACT DVPC, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 10. Ms Julie Oberin, AWAVA, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 30; Ms Virginia Geddes, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 5; Ms Barbara Crossing, Women's House Shelta, *Committee Hansard*, 6 November 2014, p. 10; and Ms Dale Wakefield, Alice Springs Women's Shelter, *Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 41.

Ms Fiona McCormack, DV Victoria, outlined the importance of funding received under NPAH for programs that helped women stay in their own homes, where it was safe to do so:

Through NPAH, the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, we were able to invest in initiatives that supported women to remain in the home through a range of different mechanisms—either by supporting change of locks and tightening security measures; or brokerage funds to either address debt or provide advocacy in relation to addressing some of the debt issues; or brokerage funds to just get them over the hump of what might be a backlog in payments in relation to mortgage or rent. So we are really very concerned about the future of the NPAH funding. This has been really critical. We are concerned about what that means in the future.<sup>39</sup>

10.42 Women's Health in the North, also outlined some examples of the crucial programs NPAH funds that help victims of domestic violence:

It is absolutely critical that funding for family violence services under the NPAH is renewed...Loss or reduction in this funding would directly affect the safety of women and children escaping family violence...Many innovations funded under [the NPAH] are local, smart and focus on early intervention, including afterhours responses to women and children responding to women have just been assaulted and the Safe at Home program, which supports women (and their children) to remain in their own homes and have the perpetrator leave, where it is safe to do so.

10.43 The National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (NFVPLS) highlighted how NPAH was a particularly important vehicle to deliver assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women:

One in ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women used a specialist homelessness service in 2012-2013...The NPAH provides crucial services and support to homeless people, with some FVPLSs units receiving funding under the agreement. For example, FVPLS Victoria is funded for two frontline positions. These positions assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault with case management and court support when they are escaping violence.<sup>40</sup>

10.44 Witnesses commented on the need for NPAH funding to be put on a more reliable footing, so relevant organisations can resource and plan effectively.<sup>41</sup> For instance, Ms Libby Eltringham, Community Legal Worker, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, told the committee:

I think one of the big barriers to women trying to safely escape violence is one safe and affordable housing...The continuity of that, the security of

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39 *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, p. 19.

40 *Submission 51*, p. 22.

41 National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, *Submission 51*, p. 22; Equality Rights Alliance, *Submission 59*, p. 6; Mr Rodney Vlasis, No to Violence, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 15.

tenure, the NPA[H] is only a year's commitment in advance and there really needs to be much more security of funding and ongoing rolling recurrent funding for organisations to be able to work safely with women.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Cuts to the National Rental Affordability Scheme***

10.45 The NRAS is a partnership between the Commonwealth and the states and territories that encourages investment in affordable rental housing. The Department of Social Services' website states:

The Scheme, which commenced in 2008, seeks to address the shortage of affordable rental housing by offering financial incentives to persons or entities such as the business sector and community organisations to build and rent dwellings to low and moderate income households at a rate that is at least 20 per cent below the market value rent.<sup>43</sup>

10.46 In the 2014-15 Commonwealth Budget the government announced it would not be proceeding with Round 5 of NRAS, which would result in savings of \$235.2 million over three years.<sup>44</sup> This means the building of a further 15,000 dwellings will not be supported by the scheme.<sup>45</sup>

10.47 Evidence received by the committee called for NRAS to be reinstated.<sup>46</sup> The Women's Centre for Health Matters submitted the defunding of NRAS was:

...a very unsettling development [that] will certainly have impacts on the security and safety of Australian individuals and families who are seeking to escape violence.<sup>47</sup>

10.48 The submission made by the National Foundation for Australian Women called for NRAS to be expanded, citing its positive effects on the housing sector:

The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) is a critical component of this investment in increasing the stock of affordable housing. NRAS aims to grow affordable rental housing stock by offering financial incentives to build and rent dwellings to low and moderate income households at least 20 per cent below the market rate. This has proven to be

42 *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 5.

43 Department of Social Services, 'National Rental Affordability Scheme – introduction' at [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programmes-services/national-rental-affordability-scheme](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programmes-services/national-rental-affordability-scheme) (accessed 17 April 2015).

44 Commonwealth Budget 2014-15, *Budget Paper 2: Budget Measures*, p. 205.

45 Dr Matthew Thomas, 'Budget Review 2014-15: Housing and Homelessness', Parliamentary Library Research Paper Series 2013-14 (May 2014), p. 147. To put this in context, NRAS 'delivered 14,575 completed dwellings with 23,884 more dwellings in progress' from 2008 to 2013. See NRAS Australia, "NRAS in short summary" at [www.nrasaustralia.com.au/](http://www.nrasaustralia.com.au/) (accessed 20 April 2015).

46 McAuley Community Services for Women, *Submission 30*, p. 7; National Foundation for Australian Women, *Submission 3*, p. 4; Ms Ana Borges, *Submission 42*, p. 6.

47 *Submission 101*, pp 15-16.

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a critical program supporting investment, especially by the social and community housing sector.<sup>48</sup>

10.49 The NRVPLS submitted that the cessation of NRAS would increase pressure on the availability of emergency accommodation, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families escaping domestic violence:

Defunding of the [NRAS] will worsen the housing crisis and decrease housing options for victims of family violence. It will also increase pressures on homeless shelters, which are already struggling to keep up with the demand. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, in particular, face discrimination in the housing market with higher birth rates creating the need for four or five bedroom homes, which are in short supply.<sup>49</sup>

### **Addressing the effects of alcohol**

10.50 In Chapter 1 the committee acknowledged alcohol as a contributing factor to domestic violence. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has found strong links between alcohol abuse and the incidence and severity of domestic and family violence in many countries.<sup>50</sup> WHO argued alcohol abuse is linked to domestic and family violence in several ways, including:

Alcohol use directly affects cognitive and physical function, reducing self-control and leaving individuals less capable of negotiating a non-violent resolution to conflicts within relationships.

Excessive drinking by one partner can exacerbate financial difficulties, childcare problems, infidelity or other family stressors. This can create marital tension and conflict, increasing the risk of violence occurring between partners.

Individual and societal beliefs that alcohol causes aggression can encourage violent behaviour after drinking and the use of alcohol as an excuse for violent behaviour.

Experiencing violence within a relationship can lead to alcohol consumption as a method of coping or self-medicating.

Children who witness violence or threats of violence between parents are more likely to display harmful drinking patterns later in life.<sup>51</sup>

10.51 The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) submitted that in Australia in 2011, there were 29,684 incidents of alcohol-related domestic and

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48 *Submission 3*, p. 4.

49 *Submission 51*, p. 21; see also Ms Ana Borges, *Submission 42*, p. 6.

50 WHO, *Intimate partner violence and alcohol fact sheet* (2006), p. 1.

51 WHO, *Intimate partner violence and alcohol fact sheet* (2006), pp 1-3. See also FARE, *Submission 144*, Attachment 2 (*The hidden harm: Alcohol's impact on children and families* [2015]), p. 8.

family violence reported to police in the four jurisdictions where data was available.<sup>52</sup> FARE also stated this data showed that the problem was getting worse in three of these jurisdictions, with the number of alcohol-related incidents of domestic and family violence reported to police annually increasing from previous years.<sup>53</sup>

10.52 In addition, FARE highlighted other statistics indicating there is a marked correlation between alcohol and the incidence and severity of domestic and family violence in Australia:

Alcohol is involved in between 23 per cent and 65 per cent of family violence incidents reported to police, and from 2002-03 to 2011-12, 36 per cent of perpetrators of intimate partner homicides had used alcohol.<sup>54</sup>

***Alcohol abuse and domestic and family violence in regional and remote communities***

10.53 The need for and provision of long term support services for alcohol abuse in regional and remote communities was highlighted to the committee.<sup>55</sup> For example, Mr Joe Morrison, Chief Executive Officer, Northern Land Council, told the committee that:

The impact of alcohol cannot be overstated as a contributor to family violence. In August 2013 APO NT [Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory] brought together a large group of Aboriginal people and organisations for two grog summits, one in Darwin and another in Alice Springs. [The final report stated]:

Further, although alcohol consumption in the Northern Territory has fallen in recent years, it is still much too high compared with that of other Australians. Between 2006 and the end of the 2011-2012 financial year, it declined from 15.5 litres of pure alcohol to around 13.5 litres a year. That's about 1,170 green cans (VB full-strength) a year for everyone aged fifteen and over. The Australian average is 10 litres of pure alcohol, equal to about 870 green cans. People in the NT are still drinking a lot more than other Australians, and much too much for their own good, and for the good of their families.<sup>56</sup>

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52 This statistic comes from data collected in New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. See *Submission 144*, Attachment 2 (*The hidden harm: Alcohol's impact on children and families* [2015]), p. 8.

53 Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory all reported increases from previous years. See *Submission 144*, Attachment 2 (*The hidden harm: Alcohol's impact on children and families* [2015]), p. 8.

54 *Submission 144*, Attachment 2 (*The hidden harm: Alcohol's impact on children and families* [2015]), p. 8.

55 For an outline of other contributing factors see evidence given by Mr John Paterson, Chief Executive Officer, AMSANT, *Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, pp 16-17.

56 *Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 18.

10.54 Ms Melanie Warbrooke, Acting Managing Solicitor, Top End Women's Legal Service, reported that the effects of alcohol abuse were particularly evident in remote communities:

With where we are at the moment, we see it more in the town camps. I go out to Knuckey Lagoon and Palmerston Indigenous Village, which are small multigroup areas with people from quite a few of the remote communities who are amalgamated into one. There are lots of problems with alcohol abuse in particular that lead to aggression and violence. Regularly you will go out there and see a house that has been quite neat and tidy the week before that is completely trashed with cars smashed up and people who have basically gone to live somewhere else for a while because they want to hide. There is lots of family infighting as well.<sup>57</sup>

10.55 Witnesses stressed the need to reduce the availability and harmful use of alcohol in Indigenous communities.<sup>58</sup> Witnesses also highlighted the lack of alcohol rehabilitation services available in remote areas, which made it hard for people in remote communities to seek help. Dr David Cooper, Research, Advocacy and Policy Manager, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), indicated:

Obviously, one of the concerns in the Territory is the lack of alcohol services that are available—particularly in remote areas—lack of rehabilitation services and alcohol services of various types. At the same time we have a regime in the Northern Territory of alcohol mandatory treatment which we have great concerns about. It is a non-evidence based approach and it is also an approach that uses a lot of resources that could be better deployed to evidence based treatment around alcohol and other drugs issues....We [also] have some concerns at the moment about the lack of expansion of [AMSANT's alcohol and other drug programs incorporated into delivery of Aboriginal primary health care]. In fact, in this recent round there are some indications that we have lost some key alcohol and other drug positions, particularly servicing remote areas. There are also other related services, such as CAAPS, that deliver a broad range of alcohol programs to communities, and we have seen cuts that have affected those kinds of programs. In the context of the importance of alcohol and other drugs issues in relation to domestic and family violence, these are very concerning areas of cuts.<sup>59</sup>

10.56 Mr John Paterson, Chief Executive Officer, AMSANT, suggested to the committee that funding of 'alcohol and other drugs, social and emotional wellbeing and mental health' be relocated back under the Department of Health portfolio instead of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Mr Paterson explained the transfer

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57 *Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 5.

58 See for example Ms Olga Havnen, Chief Executive Officer, Danila Dilba Health Service, *Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 19.

59 *Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 22.

of oversight for these services away from the Department of Health, which has expertise in these areas:

...defeats the whole purpose of developing, implementing and monitoring a comprehensive service model for those who need those very important programs and services. The sooner it gets back under the Health portfolio the better; and the best chance of us getting those outcomes we all aspire to achieve.<sup>60</sup>

## **Committee view**

### ***Long term support***

10.57 A key theme of this inquiry has been the need for crisis services to be supplemented by programs that support victims of domestic and family violence over the long term as they rebuild their lives, as well as the lives of their families.

10.58 The committee heard that services for victims of domestic and family violence are still largely focused on crisis. However, the committee heard that following the crisis, many victims have little option but to return to violent situations or run the risk of becoming homeless, as they have little support with their long-term financial, emotional and accommodation needs.

### ***Wraparound services***

10.59 The committee notes that delivering effective wraparound services is one way that governments can facilitate an enhanced model of victim services that can provide greater maintenance and stability as they recover from the effects of domestic violence.

10.60 As well as the benefits for victims and their families, it appears effective wraparound services would also reduce costs for governments over the long term, particularly where it succeeds in preventing the 'revolving door' use of crisis services by victims, and where it contributes to breaking the cycle of intergenerational domestic violence.

10.61 The committee notes that the Second Action Plan recognises the importance of delivering wraparound support, and outlines the types of services for victims and their families that would be strengthened under the second phase of the National Plan.

10.62 The committee also notes that the Second Action Plan indicates the government is committed to improving wraparound services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Housing***

10.63 The committee sees the provision of safe and affordable long-term housing as an area in which the Commonwealth can make a positive contribution. For victims

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60 *Committee Hansard*, 10 March 2015, p. 25.

61 Note National Priority 3, Action 15 - Strengthening systems integration and service delivery models for Indigenous women, Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 5 (Second Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children), p. 35.

leaving violent situations, finding emergency and long-term accommodation for themselves and their families is a critical step towards rebuilding their lives. Similarly, victims who choose to remain in their own homes following violent incidents should be supported appropriately, where it is safe to do so.

10.64 The committee welcomes the recent extension of the NPAH from 2015 to 2017, as it provides some funding certainty for organisations helping victims of domestic and family violence to find emergency and long-term accommodation.

10.65 Moreover, the committee notes the 2015-16 Commonwealth Budget made it clear that priority will be given to services working with victims of domestic violence:

The Government recognises that domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness and will ensure that funding priority is given to those service providers who are assisting women and children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and affected by domestic violence.<sup>62</sup>

10.66 The committee understands that long-term funding arrangements and the respective roles of the Commonwealth and state and territory governments in addressing housing and homelessness will be considered in the context of the government's White Paper on Reform of the Federation.<sup>63</sup>

### **Recommendation 20**

**10.67 The committee recognises the importance of the provision and availability of supportive housing models to assist victims of domestic and family violence to find safety for themselves and their children. The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government should play a lead role in identifying programs that could be implemented across the country, and in ensuring that specialist and 'wrap around' support services have access to dedicated, secure funding.**

### **Recommendation 21**

**10.68 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government, through COAG, facilitate the evaluation of existing legal measures and support programs that facilitate the removal of perpetrators of domestic and family violence from the family home so that victims many remain safely at home. If those legal measures are found to be successful, that the Commonwealth encourage all states to adopt nationally consistent 'ouster order' laws and support programs.**

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62 See the measure 'National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness — extension' in the 2015-16 Commonwealth Budget, *Budget Paper 2: Expense Measures*, p. 165.

63 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Reform of the Federation White Paper: Roles and Responsibilities in Housing and Homelessness*, Issues Paper 2 (December 2014).

### *Longer-term funding for services*

10.69 The committee wishes to draw attention to the need for longer term funding certainty in the sector which is so important to build capacity, expertise and to enable proper planning for people and resources.

10.70 As well as current ongoing work on the future funding of housing and homelessness indicated above, the committee notes the need for longer term funding certainty has been recognised as part of the Department of Social Services grants process, which will allow for longer term grant agreements, where appropriate, to offer certainty in service delivery.

10.71 Given the long term effort required to address domestic and family violence the committee would see value in governments funding relevant services using a multi-year approach to reduce the level of uncertainty and allow adequate future planning for the sector.

#### **Recommendation 22**

**10.72 The committee recognises the long term effort required to address domestic and family violence and recommends that the current Commonwealth short-term funding arrangements should be extended to a multi-year approach to reduce the level of uncertainty for services and to allow for adequate future planning in the sector.**

#### **Recommendation 23**

**10.73 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government take a lead role in the provision of affordable housing solutions in Australia to meet long-term needs for those made homeless by domestic and family violence and in order to address the backlog of victims who cannot access affordable housing which stakeholders have identified during the inquiry.**

### *Addressing the effects of alcohol*

10.74 The committee acknowledges the strong evidence base relating to the effect of alcohol and family violence incidents and is particularly concerned about statistics showing the increasing number of alcohol-related incidents of domestic and family violence reported to police in several jurisdictions.

#### **Recommendation 24**

**10.75 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government consider the framework developed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) as part of the cross-jurisdictional work it is leading through COAG to ensure the development of an integrated and focused effort to reduce the role of alcohol as a contributing factor in cases of domestic violence.**

### *Alcohol abuse and domestic and family violence in regional and remote communities*

10.76 The committee acknowledges the need for services to address alcohol abuse which can be a contributing factor to family violence. The committee was particularly

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concerned to hear the evidence from the Northern Territory about the scale of the problem in some remote Indigenous communities, as highlighted by APO NT's grog summit report.<sup>64</sup>

**Recommendation 25**

**10.77 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with the states and territories to improve the availability of alcohol rehabilitation services, including culturally appropriate services for those living in regional and remote Indigenous communities.**

Senator Katy Gallagher

Chair

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64 See APO NT, *Submission 134*, Attachment 3 (Grog Summit Communique) and Attachment 4 (Grog Summit Report).

