

Kedy Kristal

Policy Officer

Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services

2 Delhi Street

West Perth

WA 6005.

Thank-you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Directions paper for the 10-year Strategy on Homelessness

ABOUT THE WOMEN'S COUNCIL FOR DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES

The WCDFVS is the peak non-government body in Western Australia committed to improving the lives of women and children in society, and ensuring they live free from family and domestic violence. The organization provides a voice on domestic and family violence issues to help facilitate and promote policy, legislative and programmatic responses relevant to women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence.

The organization has five core functions: promoting the protection of women and children through representing their needs to policy and decision makers; representation and advocacy on a range of national committees and advisory bodies; community education; research and training on emerging issues and trends related to FDV; and information and referrals to sections of the community that would provide appropriate help to women and children.

The WCDFVS has a few key goals:

- To strengthen their unified voice on domestic and family violence issues.
- To maintain the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) as an independent viable and credible organization.
- To improve the access of women and children to Women's Refuges and services who are experiencing domestic and family violence.
- To provide leadership in the area of domestic and family violence issues to key stakeholders and the community.
- To increase the community awareness of the incidence, effects and responses to domestic and family violence.
- To collaborate with key stakeholders in the development of policies, legislation and programs which impact on women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

- To ensure access and equity for all members in remote/rural locations.

The Women's Council has responded to the proposed directions, 1, 5 and 6.

The Council has been closely involved with the 10 –year strategy on Domestic and Family Violence but is concerned that there is a risk that gaps will occur in the Homelessness strategy because assumptions will be made that the DFV strategy will be responding to DFV housing issues.

1 What is the best way to provide advice to government on emerging issues and trends on homelessness over the life of the Strategy?

By utilising a number of advisory channels, including the Housing Advisory Roundtable (HART) which includes the Tenant Action Group, people with lived experience of homelessness. Adding consumer representation and community housing advocacy groups to the WA Council on Homelessness to broaden the advice given to the Minister.

By holding quarterly forums that invite representatives from direct homeless support services e.g Perth Homeless Support group, soup patrols, Ruah drop in Centre, Utility provider's customer support staff to provide input on emerging Homelessness issues .

5 What actions would you like implemented as a priority under each focus area in the Strategy?

The direction paper mentions on page 13 the main drivers of homelessness, with women and children affected by domestic and family violence being the largest cohort at 45% but fails to actual state a figure.

Under the children and young people cohort it fails to provide any figures for the number of children from 0-18 years who are homeless and accommodated in women's refuges due to DFV.

The paper identifies the increase in older people experiencing homelessness with older women at particular risk but also fails to identify the number of older women in this cohort.

The directions paper then makes no further reference to the women and children experiencing DFV, the largest homeless cohort in WA.

Women and children experiencing Domestic and Family violence remain the invisible face of homelessness.

1 Creating sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

- 1.1 Create and trial different types of housing and accommodation that addresses the diverse needs of people across the homelessness continuum.

The Women's Council for DFV services recommends that serious consideration be given to a rapid rehousing scheme for women and children accommodated in refuges due to DFV who are assessed as having low to medium support/safety issues.

Rapid rehousing stock could come from allocated public and community housing and through private rentals with rent support payments.

Funding for refuges to provide as required outreach support for up to 12 months to these clients would be necessary.

Tasmania and Melbourne currently have rapid rehousing schemes for women and children who have experienced DFV and are currently homeless. These models provide evidence for this response.

The recent (April 2019) *Out of the Shadows Report: Domestic and Family violence: a leading cause of homelessness in Australia* by Mission Australia promotes rapid rehousing as a priority prevention response.

This initiative should be in the Homeless strategy NOT the DFV strategy as it is a housing response to the main driver of Homelessness for women and children in West Australia

2 Prevention and early intervention.

- 2.1 Focus on families and young people to break cycles of homelessness.

The Women's Council for DFV services recommends the expansion of the Safe at Home model, for which there is strong evaluation evidence (Cant, R. Meddin, B. and Penter, C. (2013). *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness evaluation of Western Australian programs Final Report*. Perth: Social Systems and Evaluation) of its success as an early intervention response to prevent women and children's homelessness due to DFV.

The expansion of the Safe at Home Model into the regional areas of West Australia delivered by a specialist women's Refuge service would provide a fair and equitable response to the homelessness that DFV causes women and children in the regional areas.

The recent (April 2019) Out of the Shadows Report: Domestic and Family violence: a leading cause of homelessness in Australia by Mission Australia promotes Safe at Home programs as a priority prevention response.

3 Transforming the existing homelessness service system to create an integrated, person-centered system.

3.2 Implement integrated, whole of government responses to homelessness.

The Women's Council agrees that homelessness is the responsibility of most government agencies including local government and that moving forward all government agencies must be held accountable to targets to reduce homelessness. However the underpinning issue of the lack of affordable, safe and appropriate public and community housing in West Australia needs to be addressed. A bipartisan 20 year strategy needs to be developed to address the basic issue of enough affordable, well maintained housing stock, now and into the future.

6 Are there any cohorts that are missing?

There is no mention of people with a disability who are homeless, apart from people with a mental health issue. There is a brief mention of GLBTIQ young people but no mention of adult GLBTIQ people and the difficulties they have accessing crisis accommodation now.

There is a brief mention of older people particularly women experiencing homelessness but no mention of the inappropriateness of crisis accommodation for older people, especially older women in refuges.

There is no mention of asylum seekers, refuges and women on temporary visas who have experienced DFV and have no access to Centrelink and Medicare and the risk of homelessness they face.