**Flinders Institute for Housing,
Urban and Regional Research**

Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness

A Synthesis Report

Prepared for the Office for Women
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs

August 2008

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Acronyms

ATSISJC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ADFVC	Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AVO	Apprehended Violence Order
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
DAA	Data Analysis Australia
DfCaLG	Department for Communities and Local Government (UK Government)
DfWaP	Department for Work and Pensions (UK Government)
DoCS	Department of Community Services (UK Government)
DoH	Department of Health (UK Government)
DoJaIR	Department of Justice and Industrial Relations (Tas.)
DVIRC	Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (Melbourne)
FHOG	First Home Owners Grant
HOME	Household Organisational Management Expenses Advice Programme
IVAWS	International Violence Against Women Survey
NDCA	National Data Collection Agency (for SAAP by the AIHW)
NPoA	National Plan of Action
NSW	New South Wales
PADV	Partnerships Against Domestic Violence
Qld.	Queensland
S4W	Security for Women
SCARCS	Senate Community Affairs References Committee Secretariat
SA	South Australia
SDVS	Southern Domestic Violence Service (Adelaide)
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SAWG	State Aboriginal Women's Gathering (SA)
SOMIH	State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UK	United Kingdom
Vic.	Victoria
WESNET	Women's Services Network
WRM	Women's Refuge Movement (NSW)
WWDA	Women with Disabilities Australia
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Organisation

Summary

Domestic and family violence related homelessness is a widespread and growing problem in Australia. However, establishing the true extent of domestic and family violence is difficult. There is no 'typical' woman who becomes homeless because of domestic and family violence. Such violence can and does affect women of all ages, cultural, social and economic backgrounds, and women living in all sorts of relationships. The election of the Rudd Government and its commitment to the development of a ten year plan to address homelessness in Australia provides promise that women and children affected by domestic and family violence, and the threat and reality of homelessness, will be given greater prominence in the public policy arena.

This report investigates the support and accommodation needs of women (and children) affected by domestic and family violence. It finds that t**here is no one solution to domestic and family violence related homelessness. There is also no easy to roll out solution**. This is because there is no one pathway into homelessness for all women affected by domestic and family violence and many women cycle in and out of homelessness and crisis accommodation.

A range of prevention and intervention initiatives are needed as part of an integrated approach to addressing domestic and family violence, and violence related homelessness. Certain types of assistance work for some victims or survivors and not for others. Moreover, the types of assistance and support needed depend greatly on the personal circumstances (health, social, cultural and geographic background et cetera) and the financial resources of/available to women, especially their independent financial capacity.

Two types of assistance are clearly critical in terms of supporting women affected by domestic and family violence:

- **provision of safe, secure and affordable housing**; and
- **provision of a continuum of individualised and open-ended support, including outreach services, that wraps around women *and their children* in a range of areas** (therapy, health, life skills, housing assistance et cetera) for as long as they need it.

Strategies are needed that raise community awareness around the issue, extent and impact of domestic and family violence on women and families. Initiatives are also required that support women at a range of well known risk points for domestic and family violence.

In terms of interventionist strategies, it is imperative that accommodation and the range of support services required by women affected by domestic and family violence (counselling, health care, therapeutic services and income support) are well integrated, individualised, ongoing and open-ended.

Housing assistance measures for women affected by domestic and family violence and who end up homeless need to include options that allow women to remain safely housed or to find affordable, stable and suitable accommodation within a short timeframe. A range of options are needed, including: accessible and well resourced shelters and refuges, safe houses for Indigenous women and cooling off spaces for Indigenous men, staying safe at home options for those women for whom they are appropriate and supported housing options for women with higher needs.

Transitional housing is a critical accommodation support for women if permanent housing can not be secured in the short term.

There is significant concern in the domestic and family violence sector that the sector itself is in crisis because of a lack of resources to assist women and a lack of exit points from crisis accommodation into longer term housing. More safe, secure, affordable and stable housing options are needed to support women to re-establish their lives post violence. These options are needed across all tenures. As a first option more public and community housing is clearly needed. Social housing is widely acknowledged as the most appropriate housing option for many women affected by domestic and family violence – largely due to affordability benchmarks. This said, housing assistance programs that help to sustain women in their current housing or to move to a more appropriate option in the private market are also needed. These programs must assist women with the cost of sustaining housing, particularly given the current affordability crisis in both the private rental sector and for some home owners. A range of options to assist women in this regard are discussed throughout the report.

There is also concern in the sector that particular groups of women have been identified as missing out on access to services. These groups include: women with disabilities, older women, younger women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with large numbers of children and women in rural, regional and remote areas.

Addressing domestic and family violence related homelessness requires a commitment from Federal, State/Territory and local governments to a long-term integrated approach to addressing the safety and security of women and children. This approach must include a commitment to increasing the funding for addressing domestic and family violence – and not only to maintain the current level of services (which are under increasing strain) but also to address unmet need and demand in the sector. An integrated approach to addressing domestic and family violence must also have bi-partisan support and a whole-of-Government focus. It must be formalised and directed at the Federal level and coordinated with State and Territory Governments, as many of the services needed for an integrated approach are State/Territory responsibilities. It must also have the support of the domestic and family violence sector, as this sector has a wealth of experience and expertise in dealing with the sensitivities and complexities involved in supporting women and children affected by domestic violence.

1. Introduction: Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness

1.1 Introduction

Increasing homelessness is a source of national shame[1]

It is now widely acknowledged that homelessness is a growing problem in Australia. Disturbingly, this remains the case despite Australians enjoying some of the most prosperous economic conditions in decades for the last 15 or so years.

What is arguably less well documented, however, is the face of homelessness in this country. A much wider cross section of society is now represented among the homeless population (Homelessness Australia c. 2008; Johnson, Gronda & Coutts 2008). The stereotypical depictions of the homeless population of the past are changing.

> The old, derelict wino on the park bench has been joined by; younger men, unemployed and hopeless; by the confused and mentally ill, frightened by the pace of activity surrounding them; by women with children, desperate to escape violent and destructive domestic situations; by young people, cast off by families who can't cope or don't care (Moyes in Wesley Mission 2001, p. 1).

One 'group' which remains largely invisible among the homeless population in this country – except, of course, to the domestic violence and homelessness sectors themselves – are the women (and their children) who end up homeless, or at risk of homelessness, because of domestic and family violence (Adkins *et al* 2003; Crinall 2001; Watson 2000). Few within the general population would realise or believe that the single greatest reason people present to Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services in Australia – the Federal and State/Territory Government's primary program for assisting homeless people – is domestic and family violence. However, the fact is, that as with homelessness generally, domestic and family violence related homelessness is a widespread and growing problem in Australia. Every year an unacceptable number of Australian women and children have their lives and housing circumstances disrupted because of domestic and family violence. This is an intolerable situation with significant impacts on all involved, especially children. Women in this situation are, and remain, the 'hidden' homeless.

Many arguments have been put forward to explain the invisibility of women's homelessness. These include: the specifics of the definitions of homelessness, the traditionally more private lives of women and the general marginalisation of women in Australian society. A new and insightful book on pathways in and out of homelessness in Australia also points to the fact that many women who end up homeless because of violence actively avoid identifying as homeless, instead pretending that their circumstances are 'normal' so as to avoid being labelled by society as either homeless or someone who has been a 'victim' of violence (see Johnson, Gronda & Coutts 2008, especially chapters 4 and 6). This is a particularly typical behaviour pattern for women affected by domestic and family violence with children, primarily because they do not want to be seen as 'bad mothers'. As Watson

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[1] Headline from the Australian Government's Green Paper on Homelessness (Commonwealth of Australia 2008, p. 8).

stated almost ten years ago now, 'the issue of homelessness has to be established as existing, and then drawn out of the shadows and illuminated' (Watson 2000, p. 161). This is particularly the case for the increasing number of women and children who because of domestic and family violence find themselves unintentionally homeless or living in inappropriate accommodation – couch surfing, living in a car, sub-standard accommodation, in caravan parks or boarding houses.

The election of the Rudd Government provides promise that at last the plight of women and children who suffer domestic and family violence and the threat and reality of homelessness will be given greater prominence in the public policy arena. The Australian Government has committed to the development of a ten year plan to address homelessness in Australia. This plan will be formalised in a policy document or White Paper on Homelessness in late 2008. Debate on the form and structure of the agenda to address homelessness has already commenced through the release of a number of 'options' designed to spark discussion around reform of existing SAAP assistance for homeless people in the Government's Green Paper on Homelessness – *Which Way Home?: A New Approach to Homelessness* (Commonwealth of Australia 2008). The Government has also signalled its commitment to addressing the incidence and impact of domestic and family violence, and sexual assault against women, establishing the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children on 26 May 2008. The Council is charged with the development of the Government's *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.*[2] In addition to developing a *National Plan,* the National Council is providing leadership and guidance to achieve the implementation of key elements of the government's election commitments to improve women's safety. These commitments include:

- developing respectful relationship resources for Australian high school students to educate young Australians, particularly boys, about the impact of domestic violence and sexual assault;

- strengthening support for White Ribbon Day education activities in rural and regional communities to promote culture-change that will reduce violence against women;

- toughening and harmonising state and territory domestic violence and sexual assault laws; and

- strengthening the Australian Institute of Criminology's National Homicide Monitoring Program to predict risk factors and inform interventions that will protect women and their children from violence;

- funding for research into international best practice models for working with perpetrators of violence.

The Federal Government has also committed to the construction of 600 additional houses to accommodate people who are homeless including women and children escaping domestic violence.

These actions have (cautiously) raised the hopes of the domestic violence and homelessness sectors that a workable solution for addressing homelessness and particularly domestic and family violence related homelessness will be developed and implemented.

This paper is a synthesis report on the complex, multifaceted and important issue of

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[2] See http://www.ofw.fahcsia.gov.au/womens_safety_agenda/national_council_reduce_violence.htm

women, domestic and family violence and homelessness. By and large, the report re-iterates the findings and recommendations presented in the two comprehensive and useful reports on housing and support services for Australian women and children affected by domestic and family violence by Chung *et al* in 2000 and more recently by Weeks and Oberin (2004). These documents are important in the context of this report as the discussion and recommendations contained in them remain as relevant today as when they were written: an indication of the fact that little has changed in terms of the types of assistance needed by women in this situation.

The information in this paper also draws on the discussion and recommendations in the responses of relevant specialist women's, domestic and family violence and homelessness sector responses to the Homelessness Green Paper (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse 2008, DV Vic 2008; Homelessness Australia 2008; WESNET 2008; WWDA 2008a; YWCA 2008). There is a wealth of suggestions and recommendations in these papers that need to be considered by Governments. Paramount among the suggestions in these submissions is the need for addressing homelessness and violence against women to be placed within a formalised Human Rights framework, where access to appropriate or safe, secure, affordable and accessible housing and freedom from violence (including within the home and the family unit) is a basic right for all, regardless of background, economic status, gender and disability.

Before moving on, it should be noted here that the consultations undertaken with representatives of, and workers in, the domestic violence and homelessness sectors, and the literature reviewed for this report clearly reveals that the pathways into homelessness due to domestic and family violence are complex. So too are the causes of domestic and family violence. The population affected by domestic and family violence is not a homogeneous population and, as such, a range of different supports and assistance is needed by women and children. Accordingly, it cannot be overstated that **there is no one solution to domestic and family violence related homelessness**, or to homelessness or domestic and family violence. **There is also no easy to roll out solution**. Certain types of assistance work for some victims or survivors of domestic and family violence and not for others. Moreover, the types of assistance and support needed depend greatly on the personal circumstances (health, social, cultural and geographic background et cetera) and the financial resources of/available to women, especially their independent financial capacity. This said, there are clearly two types of assistance which are critical in terms of assistance for women escaping or who have survived domestic violence:

- **provision of safe, secure and affordable housing**; and

- **provision of a continuum of individualised and open-ended support, including outreach services, that wraps around women *and their children* in a range of areas** (therapy, health, life skills, housing assistance et cetera) for as long as they need it.

These two types of assistance must be the central focus of an integrated **long-term** approach and commitment to addressing the safety and security of women and children. This approach must have bi-partisan support and a whole-of-Government focus. It must be formalised and directed at the Federal level and coordinated with State and Territory Governments, as many of the services needed for an integrated approach are State/Territory responsibilities.

1.2 Objectives and Aims of the Report

The objective of this report is to inform the implementation of a number of Government election commitments to reduce homelessness and the incidence of violence against women and children. As such, the aims of the project are to:

- examine how domestic and family violence leads to homelessness;

- identify the characteristics of women who are most likely to become homeless because of their experience of domestic and family violence;

- present the most successful strategies and models that prevent violence related homelessness;

- present the most successful strategies and models that provide support and accommodation for women and their accompanying children, who become homeless so they can build stable lives and be able to participate socially and economically; and

- recommend models (including staying safely at home models) that best assist women at different stages of their life course who experience domestic and family violence.

1.3 Key Terms: Defining Domestic Violence, Family Violence and Homelessness

The terms 'domestic violence', 'family violence' and 'homelessness' are used in this report as per generally used and accepted Government definitions. With regard to domestic violence, the definition developed under the Australian Government's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Initiative (PADV) (Office for the Status of Women and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2001, p. 7) offers an appropriate definition.[3] That is:

> Domestic violence occurs when one partner in a relationship attempts by physical or psychological means to dominate and control the other. It is generally understood as gendered violence, and is an abuse of power within a relationship (heterosexual and homosexual) or after separation. In the large majority of cases the offender is male and the victim female.
>
> Children and young people are profoundly affected by domestic violence, both as witnesses and as victims...

Issues of power and control are central to the definition.

It should be noted here, however, that there are many definitions of domestic violence and indeed the term domestic violence itself is a contested term; primarily because 'domestic' often denotes a private sphere of life (Weeks & Oberin 2004). It is not the intention of this report to discuss the appropriateness of definitions and terms and their evolution and contentions. Weeks and Oberin (2004) capably cover these issues in Chapter Two of their comprehensive report *Women's Refuges, Shelters, Outreach and Support Services in Australia: From Sydney Squat to Complex Services, Challenging Domestic and Family Violence* (see also Office for

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[3] Replaced in 2005 by the Women's Safety Agenda – Elimination of Violence (see http://www.ofw. fahcsia.gov.au/womens_safety_agenda/index.htm).

the Status of Women and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2001, pp. 7-11).

Family violence is used throughout this report in conjunction with domestic violence as this term is preferred by Indigenous communities, where incidents of violence are not always about intimate partner abuse (Memmott *et al* 2003). As the PADV Initiative notes,

> 'Family' covers a diverse range of ties of mutual obligation and support, and perpetrators and victims of family violence can include, for example, aunts, uncles, cousins and children of previous relationships (p. 7)

Box 1.1 lists the wide range of behaviours associated with domestic violence and family violence. These behaviours include physical, sexual, spiritual, verbal, emotional, social and economic abuse.

Box 1.1: Behaviours associated with domestic and family violence

Physical abuse - including direct assaults on the body (shaking, slapping, pushing), use of weapons, driving dangerously, destruction of property, abuse of pets in front of family members, assault of children, locking the victim out of the house, and sleep deprivation.

Sexual abuse - any form of forced sex or sexual degradation, such as sexual activity without consent, causing pain during sex, assaulting genitals, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly, criticising, or using sexually degrading insults.

Emotional abuse - blaming the victim for all problems in the relationship, constantly comparing the victim with others to undermine self-esteem and self-worth, sporadic sulking, withdrawing all interest and engagement (e.g. weeks of silence), blackmail.

Verbal abuse - continual 'put downs' and humiliation, either privately or publicly, with attacks following clear themes that focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity as a parent and spouse.

Social abuse - systematic isolation from family and friends through techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends, moving to locations where the victim knows nobody, and forbidding or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people.

Economic abuse - complete control of all monies, no access to bank accounts, providing only an inadequate 'allowance', using any wages earned by the victim for household expenses.

Spiritual abuse - denying access to ceremonies, land or family, preventing religious observance, forcing victims to do things against their beliefs, denigration of cultural background, or using religious teachings or cultural tradition as a reason for violence.

Source: Office for Women 2008; Inspire Foundation 2008

Domestic and family violence occurs within households across all age groups. It can be frequent or infrequent, and is often not obvious to an outside observer.

As used in the homelessness literature generally and in calculating homelessness statistics in Australia, the definition of homelessness in this report is based on two dominant definitions of homelessness. The first is a widely used definition developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie in 1992. This definition uses a minimum cultural community standard of being housed to determine homelessness. That is, that 'inadequate housing' means not having as a minimum standard 'a small rental flat—

with a bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom and an element of security of tenure—because that is the minimum that most people achieve in the private rental market' (p. 291). Chamberlain and MacKenzie's definition of homeless is further broken down into three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. Further definition of each of these is provided in Box 1.2.

Box 1.2: Chamberlain and MacKenzie's three levels of homelessness

Primary homelessness: refers to people who are 'roofless'. That is people without conventional accommodation including people living in improvised dwellings, on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting, living in cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

Secondary homelessness: people in stop-gap housing or people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. Includes people using crisis or transitional accommodation such as a refuge or a shelter within SAAP, those residing temporarily with other households who have no accommodation of their own, and those using boarding houses on a short-term basis (i.e. for less than 12 weeks).

Tertiary homelessness: refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis (for more than 13 weeks).

Source: Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003

Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003) also draw attention to another group they consider to be marginally housed and therefore at risk of homelessness: people renting accommodation in caravan parks because of financial necessity rather than as a 'lifestyle choice' and who may have difficulty accessing other more conventional housing in the market.

Many women (and children) who escape domestic and family violence may fall into one or more of these categories of homelessness after leaving the perpetrator of the violence. This said, many women escaping domestic and family violence are not actually 'roofless', as they have a home to live in. However, because this place is an *unsafe* place for them to live they are homeless (Chung *et al* 2000; Weeks & Oberin 2004; Johnson, Gronda and Coutts 2008).

The definition of homelessness used in the SAAP program itself (see Box 1.3) recognises the safety of an individual's or family's home as a factor in determining homelessness, as well as other factors such as whether housing damages a person's health, is affordable and provides an adequate level of amenity. Homelessness Australia – the national peak advocacy body for homeless Australians and homelessness organisations in Australia – uses this definition of homelessness.[4]

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[4] See http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/site/aboutus.php

Box 1.3: Definition of homeless in the SAAP Act 1994 (Cth)

Definition of "homeless"

(1) For the purposes of this Act, a person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing.

Inadequate access to safe and secure housing
(2) For the purposes of this Act, a person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access:
    (a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or
    (b) threatens the person's safety; or
    (c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
        (i) adequate personal amenities; or
        (ii) the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; or
    (d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.

Person living in SAAP accommodation
(3) For the purposes of this Act, a person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if:
    (a) the person is living in accommodation provided under SAAP
    (b) the assessment of the person's eligibility for that accommodation was based on the application of subsection (1) or (2) (ignoring the effect of this subsection

(4) Subsections (2) and (3) do not limit the generality of subsection (1)

2. Methodology and Limitations

2.1 Methodology

To meet the objectives of this report (see 1.2) a two stage methodology was used. First, a review of the national and international published and unpublished literature on women, domestic and family violence and homelessness was carried out. This review revealed an extensive body of literature around these issues.

Relevant literature and data for the report was identified by:

- searching two key electronic databases to locate academic literature of relevance, i.e. Thomson Scientific's *ISI Web of Knowledge* and Bell and Howell Information's *ProQuest.* Search terms used included combinations of words such as: women, domestic, violence, homelessness, model, women's safety strategies, elder abuse, disability, safety housing, et cetera.

  These searches revealed the volumes of information written nationally and internationally relevant to the topic of the report, and the breadth of the disciplines involved, i.e. psychiatry, medicine, health and social care, criminal law, housing, civil rights, policy and management. The literature search was largely limited to material published since 2000, as the seminal piece of work on women, domestic and family violence and homelessness by Chung *et al* (2000) reviewed the literature to this point in time, and one of the de facto objectives of this report was to identify what has changed in terms of women, domestic and family violence and homelessness since the publication of *Home Safe Home*;

- searching the websites of Australian and overseas governments including the Federal Government, all State and Territory Governments, the UK, US and Canadian Governments;

- searching the websites of service and research organisations known to be active in related fields of study – e.g. the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, WESNET, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and VicHealth;

- searching the websites and links of the main women's information and advocacy organisations in Australia, i.e. the Young Women's Christian Association, the National Foundation for Australian Women, Security4Women and the Federal Government's Office for Women;

- Searching through journals which do not have an electronic presence for example *Parity*; and

- following leads suggested by the participants in the telephone interviews.

Second, a series of targeted interviews was undertaken with selected service providers, peak women's domestic and family violence and homelessness groups, and client representatives across Australia. Interviews were undertaken with relevant people and organisations across as many jurisdictions as possible, and with organisations assisting vulnerable groups, including women with disabilities, Indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The organisations and groups interviewed were selected in consultation with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

Many of the groups interviewed contacted the researchers directly, having received notification about the project through the networks of the national women's secretariats (Security4Women, WomenSpeak, Australian Women's Coalition and the National Rural Women's Coalition). Appendix A lists the groups and organisations consulted or with whom discussions took place.

The targeted consultations were conducted mostly through telephone interviews and teleconferences, though some were held face-to-face. Participants in the consultations were asked three basic questions to guide the discussions in the interviews. These were:

- what are the essential needs of women who experience domestic and family violence and are homeless or at risk of homelessness?

- are there particular groups of women (e.g. rural women) who are missing out on access to housing, services and assistance?

- are there any housing models (housing programs or housing assistance) for women in this situation that you know of that are working?

The consultations provided important information on the:

- women who face the prospect of homelessness and who seek help/and or receive assistance from service providers in both urban and regional and rural Australia due to domestic and family violence. While direct input from women who have experienced violence and/or homelessness was not sought (the tight timeframe for the project and effective ethical processes cannot occur in such a short timeframe), a number of the professional people involved in roles with relevant peak bodies and service providers were able to provide examples of the experiences of women who have experienced homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence;

- issues peak bodies and service providers confront everyday, including the level of unmet need experienced in various parts of the country and the effect the decline in public housing and housing affordability in general are having on levels of homelessness among women;

- suitability and success/failure of particular housing programs operating in the different jurisdictions of Australia and the suitability and applicability of international models; and

- specific needs and challenges faced by women from a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and from different stages of the life course.

Despite the demands on the domestic and family violence and homelessness sectors generally (from numerous recent and current Government consultations on certain policies) and the immediacy of the timeframe necessary in consulting with people, the sector was overwhelmingly generous in assisting with this project. It is a sector comprised of people with many decades of experience, passion, dedication and a wealth of knowledge that cannot be adequately presented in this synthesis report. This wealth of experience and understanding of the complexity of the issues involved, of the needs of women and children affected by domestic and family violence, of the holistic integrated approach that is needed to assist women find stable, affordable housing must be an integral part of the planning process and of the development of any approaches to ameliorate homelessness.

2.2   Limitations of the Report

The tight timeframe placed on this project – six weeks from commencement to submission of final report to the Office for Women – meant that a very focused approach was required for the research and consultations. Because of this the authors acknowledge that this is by no means a comprehensive synthesis of the issue of women, domestic and family violence and homelessness. This is a complex issue, and the authors of this report do not purport to have located all working and workable models of housing assistance for women. The short timeframe for this project and difficulties encountered by the researchers in finding the specific details of support initiatives and, importantly, evaluations of such initiatives, means that other appropriate models to assist women may exist, particularly internationally. A comprehensive review of international housing and support models to assist women escaping domestic violence requires a much more detailed review of literature and practice experience than possible here. It would also require direct consultation with stakeholders and clients of such programs, particularly given the absence of evaluations of such programs.

This report is a 'synthesis report' – it synthesises the important issues around this topic: the extent of domestic violence related homelessness; emerging groups of women in need and some of the key program and strategies operating or needed in the sector to support women affected by domestic and family violence, especially for those women (and their children) who become homeless. The opinions and experiences of people working in the sector informed the direction of the research.

Because of the tight timeframe on the research, it was impossible to investigate the options for women affected by domestic and family violence who do not access crisis accommodation – the vast majority of women affected by domestic and family violence. We did, however, ask the people we spoke to from the domestic violence and homelessness sectors about these women. Most participants commented that they did not know what these women do, or expect that they make their own way through the trauma of the violence and the housing system, or stay with friends or relatives. These comments reinforce the brief discussion of what women who do not access crisis services do that is included in the comprehensive report by Weeks and Oberin in 2004 (see section 4.10, pp. 71-72).

The main source of data for this report was National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) data, from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The data present statistics on the characteristics of users of SAAP services across Australia – the Federal and State/Territory Governments' support program to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; providing transitional supported accommodation and associated support services 'in order to help people who are homeless to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence' (AIHW 2007b). The discussion of the extent and characteristics of women affected by domestic and family violence in this report is therefore not representative of all women in Australia affected by violence. It does not provide information on the characteristics of the majority of women who do not use/access crisis accommodation services. Data on the characteristics of these women is not collected in any regular and comprehensive fashion. The NDCA SAAP data or the published information from the analysis of these data also has other limitations. For example, the data does not collect information on such things as disability; an issue raised as a concern in section 4.3 of this report.

The NDCA data available on women using SAAP services because of domestic and family violence is drawn from the current Homeless people in SAAP – *SAAP National*

Data Collection Annual Report, 2006–07, Australia (AIHW 2008). While this publication provides important data on certain characteristics of all SAAP users, including women escaping domestic violence, the data is not as detailed as the data presented in the bulletins on certain SAAP users produced by the AIHW, i.e. *Female SAAP Clients and Children Escaping Domestic and Family Violence 2003-04* (AIHW: Marcolin 2005). An update of this bulletin with the current data on SAAP users affected by domestic and family violence would assist greatly in understanding the characteristics of women affected by domestic and family violence presenting to services, and is clearly needed. Production of an updated series of custom tables from the NDCA data on women using SAAP services because of domestic and family violence as is presented in Weeks and Oberin (2004, chapter six) to 2001-02, is also needed to show trends among women over time, i.e. tracking changes in the age profile of female clients presenting to SAAP because of domestic and family violence, as well as by CALD background, for Indigenous women, for women with and without children and changes in these statistics by State/Territory.

The tight timeframe for researching the topic of this report also means that there are some areas this report could not specifically cover. These include: broad strategies for prevention of domestic and family violence against women, and for early intervention to prevent violence. It was also not possible to undertake a comprehensive investigation of the many prevention and early intervention strategies for domestic and family violence generally. Limited discussion of these strategies, is included in section 5.1.

A number of areas/issues in need of further research are identified throughout the report. For example, detailed examination of working and proven successful early intervention actions – this is something that should be a priority of the Federal Government's new National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children to commission as part of the Government's *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.* Other areas where further research is needed include:

- the extent and impact of domestic and family violence on women in remote mining communities and the capacity of regional domestic violence services to meet the needs of women in these areas;

- how to better support women from CALD backgrounds on 457 visas;

- a national study investigating the accessibility of domestic and family violence services for women with disabilities;

- long-term research on the housing and support needs of women affected by family violence in remote Indigenous communities;

- income support measures for women affected by domestic and family violence;

- housing assistance measures for women affected by domestic and family violence;

- what long-term support is needed by and works for women affected by domestic and family violence; and

- an extensive examination (and ongoing examination) of the support and housing models/programs assisting women affected by domestic and family violence across Australia and overseas.

3. Domestic and Family Violence Related Homelessness

3.1 Extent of Domestic and Family Violence Related Homelessness

Domestic and family violence is an issue that affects a significant proportion of Australian women. However, establishing the true extent of domestic and family violence is difficult. Survey data provide an insight but the level of violence recorded is contingent on numerous factors including the definition of domestic and family violence, the timeframe in which the violence occurred and is recorded (i.e. across the lifetime, over the previous 10 years, five years, one year), the method of data collection and variability in the population surveyed. Data from the most recent survey of violence by the ABS – the *Personal Safety Survey*, on the prevalence of partner violence against women indicates that **around one in six adult women (17.0 per cent) have experienced actual or threatened physical or sexual violence perpetrated by a partner since the age of 15** (ABS 2007, p. 201; ABS 2006b). This figure does not include other forms of violence as specified in definition of domestic violence used in this report. It also does not include acts of 'family' violence. Findings of the *Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)* conducted in 2002-03 indicate that **over a lifetime 34 per cent of Australian women experience actual or threats of physical violence, sexual violence (including unwanted sexual touching) and psychological violence (controlling behaviour) from a current or former partner** (Mouzos & Makkai 2004, p. 44). This survey found that in the five years prior to the survey around one in ten women experienced domestic violence and less than five per cent of women experienced domestic violence in the preceding 12 months (Mouzos & Makkai 2004, p. 44). Data from the *Personal Safety Survey* indicates similar levels of violence over these time periods – five per cent experiencing violence (physical and sexual) over the preceding five years and around one per cent in the 12 months prior to the survey (ABS 2007, p. 201).

It should be noted here that these data are considered underestimates of the true extent of domestic and family violence as survey data on family violence are not available, survey data are unlikely to include many of the high risk groups such as women in refuges and remote Indigenous communities and the variability in the actual reporting of violence both in survey data and to authorities. Most incidences of domestic or family violence are not reported to authorities (see Mouzos & Makkai 2004; also ABS 2007; Carrington with Philips 2006; Philips & Park 2006; Data Analysis Australia 2007). Data from the most recent survey of violence by the ABS – the *Personal Safety Survey*, suggests that rates of reporting violence among women, however, are trending upwards. For example, in the 2005 ABS Personal Safety Survey, 63 per cent of women who had experienced physical assault by a partner in the five years prior to the survey did not report the incident to police, compared to 74 per cent in the 1996 *Women's Safety Survey* (ABS 2007, p. 204). For those women who experienced sexual assault by a partner in the previous five years, 81 per cent did not report it to police compared to 85 per cent in the 1996 (ABS 2007 p. 204). This trend may well be an indication that women are more willing now than before to report acts of violence against them – perhaps an indication of the success of the 'Australia Says No to Violence' campaign run by the Australian Government.

The most comprehensive data available is collected as part of the SAAP and only presents data on persons who present to a SAAP service. As outlined in the Green Paper – *Which Way Home?* (Commonwealth of Australia 2008) while census data indicate that overall men are more likely to experience homelessness (58 per cent of

people in primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness at the time of Census 2001 were men), SAAP data for 2006-07 clearly shows women are more likely to use SAAP services because they are less likely to experience primary homelessness (sleeping rough) and seek crisis accommodation as in many instances they are accompanied by children (AIHW 2008).

Domestic and family violence is overwhelmingly the major reason women seek assistance. For women with children, domestic and family violence was the reason in 55 per cent of support periods while an additional 7.7 per cent of support periods were sought for relationship and family breakdown. For unaccompanied women aged 25 years and over domestic and family violence was the most cited reason (in 36.9 per cent of support periods), with relationship and family breakdown accounting for 4.5 per cent of support cases. For women aged under 25 relationship and family breakdown was the most cited reason (21.0 per cent); domestic and family violence was the second most cited reason (16.2 per cent of periods) (AIHW 2008, p. 37).

While these data provide an insight into the relevance of domestic and family violence to the level of homelessness in Australia they provide little understanding of the numbers of people involved. In 2005 the AIHW produced a special bulletin on female SAAP clients escaping domestic and family violence based on 2003-04 data (AIHW: Marcolin 2005). This bulletin provides a clearer insight into the number of individuals affected. The publication provides considerable detail on the characteristics of the women.

Box 3.1 indicates that in 2003-04 over 67,000 individuals, including 34,700 children, sought refuge through SAAP services to escape domestic and family violence. While these are significant figures in their own right, alarmingly, some 50 per cent of women who approached a SAAP agency in 2005-06 were turned away because of lack of capacity within the sector to meet demands (AIHW 2007a).[5] Most of these women approached SAAP services because of the inadequacy (number and suitability) of their accommodation. The consultations with SAAP funded domestic and family violence organisations as part of this project revealed that turn away rates in the sector remain at around 50 per cent, or higher in some areas of the country, i.e. in regional and remote areas.

These data provide a point in time snapshot of the incidence of domestic and family violence. The availability of specifically requested SAAP data to Weeks and Oberin (2004) allowed them to ascertain trends over time. The data for the period 1996-2002, indicated:

- over this period the number of women accessing SAAP services increased;

- all age groups are affected but the age group most likely to seek assistance from SAAP were women aged 25-44 years;

- there was a 26.2 per cent increase in women aged 25-44 years seeking SAAP assistance and a 50 per cent increase for women aged 45-64 years (p. 96); and

- analysis by cultural background indicated upward trends over the study period for both Indigenous women (increase of 46.8 per cent from 4,700 persons to 6,900) and women from CALD backgrounds (an increase of 90 per cent from 3,000 persons to 5,700 persons).

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[5] This is the most recent data available on unmet need for women at the time of writing this report.

Box 3.1: General characteristics of female SAAP clients escaping domestic and family violence 2003-04

Of clients accessing SAAP services in 2003-04, **33 per cent or 32,700 clients** were women escaping domestic violence.

In addition 66 per cent (34,700) of the 52,700 accompanying children in SAAP were with a parent or guardian escaping domestic violence. Most of these children (89 per cent) were aged under 12 years.

Indigenous women are significantly over-represented in the SAAP female domestic client group accounting for 24 per cent of women escaping domestic violence in 2003-04.

Overseas born women accounted for another 19 per cent and of these women 78 per cent were born in a predominately non-English speaking country.

One in two women who approached agencies were unable to obtain immediate accommodation on an average day.

Main reason why requests not met: insufficient accommodation available.

Source: AIHW: Marcolin 2005

Consultations with peak bodies and service providers indicate that these trends have been ongoing since 2002. More up-to-date analysis of the most recent SAAP data is necessary to gain a better understanding of new and emerging trends among different client groups. This should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

The data above records approaches by women to SAAP services yet there are many other means by which women seek refuge from domestic and family violence without being recorded in the SAAP statistics. Many women, in fact survey data would suggest the majority of women, seek help from family or friends or from professional services like doctors or counsellors. For example 81 per cent of women in the *Personal Safety Survey* (ABS 2007 p. 204) who experienced physical assault by a partner during the five years prior to the survey had told other people like family and friends. Thirty-six per cent had sought professional help from a doctor, counsellor, minister or priest. Extrapolation of the 2005 *Personal Safety Survey* to the total Australian population (Table 3.1) indicates that the proportion of women seeking help from a crisis service is lower than the figures quoted above for women seeking informal help and varies depending on the type of violence experienced.

It is difficult to quantify the total number of women and children who experience domestic and family violence related homelessness each year. Data Analysis Australia's application of the findings of the 2005 *Personal Safety Survey* to the total Australian population indicates violence by a current or former partner affected significant numbers of women each year. For example, 73,152 women had experienced physical assault in the twelve months prior to the survey, 24,855 had been threatened or been the subject of attempted physical assault, while 27,646 had experienced sexual assault and 5,071 had been threatened sexually by a current or former partner (DAA 2007, p. 22). The recent ABS *Crime and Safety Survey* (2006) indicates that the incidence of violence against women by a partner, ex-partner or family member in a twelve month period is also considerable. The survey, conducted during April and July 2005 found that in the twelve months prior to the survey some 110,200 women indicated they had experienced violence or abuse (ABS 2006a).

Table 3.1: **Percentage of women who experienced violence (by Type) in the twelve months prior to the *Personal Safety Survey* by a current or previous partner who accessed a crisis service after the latest incidence of violence**

Type of Violence	Count[a]	Total experienced violence type by current and former partner[b]	Percentage Used Service
Physical assault	14,911	73,152	20.4
Physical threat/attempted threat	2,544	24,855	10.2
Sexual assault	10,474	27,646	37.9
Sexual threat	1,741	5,071	34.3

Source: Calculated from DAA 2007

Notes:
a. data from DAA 2007 Table 35 (p. 62) 'crisis help'
b. data from DAA 2007 Table 10 (p. 22) 'current partner' and 'previous partner'

These figures only highlight the extent of violence against women from partners. This is only one aspect of the violence against women issue. The number of women victimised as a child or the number of children currently affected either personally or as a witness is also considerable. Findings from the Australian component of the *International Violence Against Women Survey* (IVAWS) indicate 29 per cent of the women surveyed experienced physical and or sexual violence before the age of 16. For one in five of these women the perpetrator had been a parent (Mouzos & Makkai 2004, p. 4).

The work of Data Analysis Australia (DAA) suggests (based on the results of the ABS *Personal Safety Survey* in 2005) 779,520 women were physically abused before the age of 15 and 956,602 were sexually abused by this age. For the vast majority of these women this abuse was committed by a family member. Being abused as a child makes women much more susceptible to violence later in life. The *IVAWS* found women who experienced violence in childhood were 1.5 times more likely to experience violence as an adult (Mouzos & Makkai 2004, p. 4). DAA found women who experienced violence at a young age were twice as likely to be a victim of partner violence in adulthood compared to the adult female population as a whole (DAA 2007, p. 40). In addition to being the subject of abuse children are often witness to domestic violence and this can have a significant bearing on their present and future wellbeing (DAA 2007). According to DAA's work they estimate approximately 50,000 children witnessed violence by the current partner of a women who experienced domestic violence and over 400,000 children were exposed to the violence perpetrated by a previous partner (DAA 2007, p. 41 & 89). This has a 'negative impact on children's development and increased rates of violence in later life is one more reason to provide prevention and intervention services to reduce domestic violence' (DAA 2007, p. 40; see also UNICEF's recent publication on the Impact of Domestic Violence in the Home – part of the global *Stop Violence in the Home Campaign* (UNICEF 2008)).

Clearly incidences of domestic and family violence within the community are considerably higher than official statistics indicate and it is only when the threat becomes too much or other chosen options are no longer available (for example staying with friends) that these women and children come to the attention of service providers. Unfortunately some women do not recognise the seriousness of the threat and they and/or their children become victims of domestic homicide.

3.2   How Domestic and Family Violence Lead to Homelessness

Many commentators have described the relationship between domestic and family violence and homelessness (Chung *et al* 2000; Patton 2003; also Weeks & Oberin 2004). Johnson, Gronda and Coutts (2008) in their book *On the Outside: Pathways In and Out of Homelessness*, identify domestic violence as one of five 'typical' pathways into homelessness in Australia at the current time (see pp. 23-33). That is, along with a mental health pathway, a substance abuse pathway, a youth pathway (first experience of homelessness when aged under 18), and a housing crisis pathway. MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2003) also discuss domestic violence as a key factor in homelessness pathways; a significant factor in what they term the 'family breakdown' pathway; a major adult homelessness pathway (see pp. 38-45).

There is no one pathway into homelessness for all women affected by domestic and family violence. However, we do know from the research on domestic and family violence and homelessness that it is concern for safety that leads most women (and their children) into homelessness. Women experiencing domestic and family violence generally reach what is known as a crisis point or tipping point in their lives – a point where they fear for their own safety or that of their children and which necessitates them leaving their home for safer accommodation. For some women this point is reached quickly and follows one (major) incident of violence. For others it may take years for them to make the decision to flee the violence and leave home, and this decision may follow changes in the frequency of violence against them or escalation in the intensity of abuse. It may also follow re-direction of violence to their children, or sexual abuse (or repeated sexual abuse) against themself or a child (see Johnson, Gronda & Coutts 2008; Laing 2000).

Most women who become homeless because of domestic violence are by Chamberlain and MacKenzie's definition (Box 1.2) in the secondary category of homelessness. They are not homeless in the 'roofless' sense, as most have a house (or home), but this house/home has gradually or immediately become unsafe for them and/or their children. Women in this situation are what Nunan (1999) termed the 'housed homeless' (p. 38) or, as Wardhaugh (1999, p. 92) offers, 'homeless at home'. Chung *et al* (2000, pp. 16-18) discuss this issue at length in their seminal report *Home Safe Home*. They comment that for many women affected by domestic and family violence, the exposure to violence, and the duration of the exposure to violence, has broader impacts than just safety. 'Violence against women in the home denies them [women and children] their security and safety and destroys foundations of their identity' (Chung *et al* 2000, p. 18). The violence also often affects women's sense of belonging, control and self-worth, affecting their self-confidence and self-esteem. For many women violence and abuse also results in isolation and reduced social inclusion and social connectedness – to friends, family and community. This limits participation in the labour force, or the women are prevented from working by their partners, affecting their ability to generate independent financial resources and to afford to leave their partner and live an independent life.

In the consultations undertaken for this project, many domestic service providers pointed to the fact that domestic violence related homelessness is different from other forms of homelessness. This is because many women in abusive and controlling relationships return to the perpetrator of the violence against them, cycling in and out of homelessness and crisis accommodation as they try to rebuild their relationship with their partner – generally for the benefit of their children. Many women have, or reach, multiple tipping points. Cycling in and out of homelessness is normal for many women affected by domestic violence – part of the cycle of domestic and family violence. DAA's (2007, p. 35) extrapolation of the *Personal Safety Survey*

2005 to the wider Australian population found that 59,402 women who had experienced violence by a current partner indicated that they had been separated from their partner and returned to the relationship. Half (50 per cent) of those women had been separated once, the remainder had separated twice (20 per cent), three times (14 per cent) or more than three times (15 per cent). Reasons given for returning to a violent partner included: that the partner had promised to stop the violence, for the sake of their children, having no money or financial resources, having nowhere else to go, and fear of the partner. Where there is a history of partner violence, separation heightens the risk of escalation and the chance of serious assault and homicide (Humphreys 2007).

MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2003) represent the typical family breakdown pathway diagrammatically and the movement 'in and out' of homelessness, with domestic violence being a dominant feature of this pathway (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1:   A diagrammatic pathway to homelessness from family breakdown
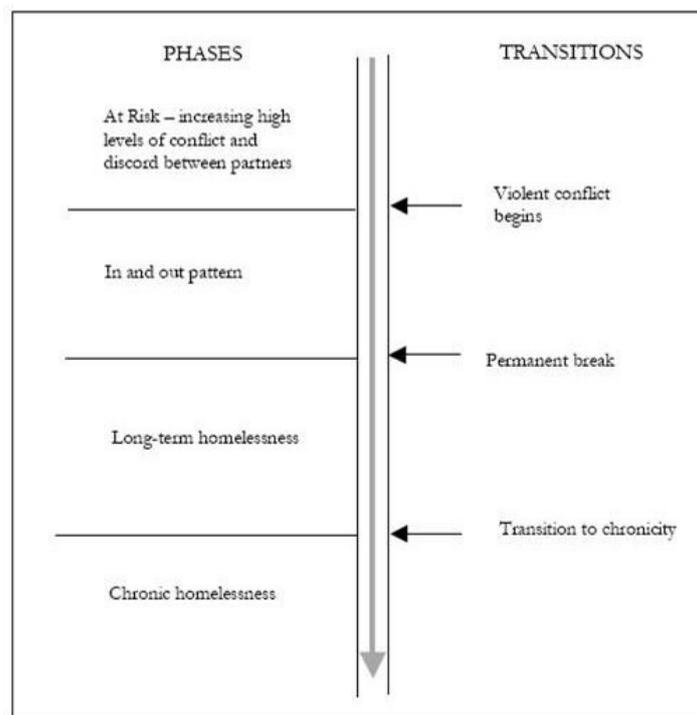
Source: MacKenzie and Chamberlain 2003, p. 40

The next section of this report discusses the characteristics of women who are most likely to become homeless because of their experience of domestic and family violence. These factors are also important in terms of why and how domestic and family violence leads to homelessness. Women's lack of independent financial resources and poverty, for example, are critical determinants in women escaping violence ending up homeless.

It should also be mentioned here that the level of domestic violence related homelessness (and homelessness generally) could well increase in future years. This could particularly be the case if the financial pressures on households continue to intensify because of the increasing unaffordability of housing and the rising cost of living generally, creating tension within family units and, in some cases, translating into violence within a household (or more frequent or intense violence).

Financial stress related domestic violence and homelessness is already a very real issue in the US – where many low and medium income families have lost their homes because of the subprime mortgage crisis (see Erlenbusch *et al* 2008; Lynam 2007). A number of publications and organisations in the US, including the National Coalition for the Homeless point to increasing levels of domestic violence associated with higher levels of unemployment and mortgage stress – culminating in an increase in homelessness (see Armour 2008; Bienick 2007).

3.3 Characteristics of Women Most Likely to Become Homeless because of Domestic and Family Violence

Just as there is no one pathway into homelessness for women (and children) affected by domestic and family violence, there is also no 'typical' woman who becomes homeless because of domestic and family violence. Domestic and family violence can and does affect women of all ages, cultural, social and economic backgrounds, and women living in all sorts of relationships. And, just as Australia's female population is an increasingly diverse population (see Tually, Beer & Faulkner 2007), the backgrounds and needs of women affected by domestic and family violence related homelessness is also diverse. That said, there are a number of common characteristics shared by many women in this situation.

First, while in recent surveys (DAA 2007; Mouzos & Makkai 2004) income per se has been found not to be a correlate of victimisation, the availability of an income shapes the accommodation options available to women and their children – and ultimately their susceptibility to homelessness. Poverty and a lack of an independent income for women affected by domestic and family violence is a major cause of homelessness. Women do not become homeless if they can afford not to (ADVCH 2008). WESNET research with a large number of domestic violence service providers identified poverty as a main issue for women in 32 per cent of cases (Weeks & Oberin 2004, p. 98).

In 2003-04, 5.7 per cent of women affected by domestic and family violence in closed SAAP support periods presented with no income at all, with a further 0.6 per cent awaiting a government benefit/pension and 82.8 on some form of government benefit/pension. One of the many important roles performed by domestic violence service providers in Australia is to establish financial resources (through employment or government support) so that women in this situation can begin to rebuild their lives independently of their former partner if that is what they choose. In 2003-04 a lower proportion of women escaping domestic and family violence left closed SAAP support periods with no incomes (3.6 per cent after versus 5.7 before) and a higher proportion were on a government benefit or pension after their support period ended (86.3 per cent) (AIHW: Marcolin 2005, Table A9).

Second, women presenting to SAAP services for assistance because of domestic and family violence are overwhelmingly aged in their mid 20s to early 40s. Data profiling SAAP clients escaping domestic violence in 2003-04 recorded that almost two-thirds (62.5 per cent) were aged between 25 and 44 (AIHW: Marcolin 2005, Table A1). ABS statistics on the characteristics of women experiencing partner violence – derived from the 2005 *Personal Safety Survey* – confirms this trend, showing that in the twelve months prior to being interviewed for the Survey, women aged 25-34 reported the highest rate of partner violence (see also discussion above). This is consistent with the rising age of women having their first baby and the increased risk of violence during pregnancy or after the birth of the first child (DAA

2007). Women aged 55 years and over were between four and five times less likely to have reported partner violence than those aged 25-34. Of course, these figures are only indications of partner violence and not all women admit to partner violence in such surveys, or generally, because of feelings of shame and embarrassment and/or because they do not want to relive such trauma, they feel that nothing can be done about it or they can deal with it themself (DAA 2007, section 5; Mouzos & Makkai 2004, chapter 6). Even so these findings are consistent across surveys (see *Personal Safety Survey* 2005 (ABS 2006), DAA 2007; *Women's Safety Survey* 1996 (ABS 1996); and the Australian component of the *International Violence Against Women Survey* (Mouzos & Makkai 2004)).

Third, as discussed above we know from ABS statistics and other surveys that women who suffer childhood abuse, including those sexually abused as children, are overrepresented among women experiencing partner violence (see ABS 2007, p. 202). This is supported in the findings of the Australian component of the *International Violence Against Women Survey* (Mouzos & Makkai 2004, pp. 89).

> Women who experienced abuse during childhood were one and a half times more likely to experience any violence in adulthood (78% versus 49%...). The risk of sexual violence in adulthood doubles for women who were abused as a child.

Given these general trends in terms of violence, it seems logical to also assume that women who experienced childhood abuse are overrepresented among users of SAAP services. Statistics on this issue are not available for SAAP service users.

Some commentators suggest that a primary reason that women who suffered sexual abuse as a child also suffer domestic and family violence as an adult, is because survivors of sexual abuse often don't develop conventional functional understandings of relationships and therefore do not understand 'good' and healthy relationships, have impaired self esteem and see early warning signs in the form of dysfunctional behaviours as normal (Kralik, D. [RDNS Research Unit, RDNS SA] 2008, pers. comm., 17 July).

Fourth, we know from SAAP data, and data on the health and wellbeing of Australia's Indigenous population, that a significant number of women in domestic and family violence related homelessness are Indigenous women. In 2003-04, one in four female clients seeking SAAP assistance because of domestic and family violence was Indigenous. As with non-Indigenous Australians, domestic and family violence was the main reason people attended SAAP services and in 2005-06. Thirty-one per cent of Indigenous Australians reported domestic and family violence as the main reason for seeking SAAP assistance, compared with 21 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians (ABS & AIHW 2008).

The overrepresentation of Indigenous women among users of SAAP domestic violence services is a well documented and discussed trend. Domestic and family violence is a particular issue for Indigenous Australians, reflecting the extensiveness and impact of family violence in Indigenous communities (ABS & AIHW 2008; AIHW 2006; Cooper & Morris 2005; Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002; ATSISJC 2006). As discussed in the most recent edition of *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (2008)

> 41% of Indigenous people in remote areas and 14% of those in non-remote areas reported that family violence was a neighbourhood problem. In 2003–04 Indigenous females were hospitalised for family

> violence-related assaults at **35 times** the rate of non-Indigenous females...

Such violence has a significant impact on Indigenous children.

> In 2005–06 there were 11,600 Indigenous children who attended a SAAP service with their parent or guardian. Among Indigenous children aged four years or less, one in every 11 attended a SAAP service in 2005–06... (p. 78).

While Indigenous women (and accompanying children) are overrepresented among users of SAAP domestic violence services, they generally stay in crisis accommodation for much shorter periods of time than do other cultural groups and non-Indigenous women. For many Indigenous women SAAP services are used for time out or respite or as a means of avoiding known peaks in family violence (for discussion see Cooper & Morris 2005; Keys Young 1998b).

We also know from SAAP data – as indicated earlier (see Box 3.1) – that more than half of women in domestic violence related homelessness present to SAAP services with children. Children are the voiceless and hidden victims of domestic violence in Australia. Given that witnessing domestic violence is known to not only have major psychological impacts on children, as well as causing some children to develop behavioural and other problems, including perpetrating violence themselves, ensuring that the support needs of children are met is of crucial importance (Weeks & Oberin 2004, p. 98).

Losing children to the welfare system is a major concern for many women affected by domestic and family violence (Laing 2000, p. 17). It is also a common threat used by perpetrators to make their partners stay with them. The exposure of children to ongoing violence by the perpetrator is a significant threat concerning many women (and children) affected by domestic and family violence (Moloney 2007).

Finally, it needs to be mentioned here that the population of women who are homeless because of domestic and family violence is increasingly becoming a population with complex and multiple needs, i.e. due to drug and alcohol issues, mental health issues, disability et cetera. Many service providers interviewed for this research vehemently emphasised this point, and their concerns that this is placing increasing pressure on the resources they have to assist women generally, as women with multiple and complex needs require more intensive support and often specialised accommodation. This is generally much more costly to provide.

4.   Emerging Groups of Women in Need of Assistance

4.1   Introduction: Emerging Groups of Women in Need

For over a decade now particular groups of women have been identified as missing out on access to services or who are less likely to use existing domestic and family violence services (Keys Young 1998a; Chung *et al* 2000). The consultation process as part of this report highlighted an array of emerging groups of women in need that cover a wide cross-section of the community. While some service providers focus on the needs of these groups, in many instances, no progress or little progress has been made over the last decade in tackling the issues confronting these women (Weeks & Oberin 2004).

In discussing the emerging groups of women affected by domestic and family violence in need it should be stated that the women in **greatest need** are those in need of crisis accommodation on any one night in Australia who are turned away because of a lack of capacity in the SAAP sector to meet their needs and those of their accompanying children. As pointed out in Box 3.1, 50 per cent of women who approach agencies to receive immediate accommodation on any one day are turned away. Many of these women (and their accompanying children) will be representatives of the groups of women identified below.

4.1.1   Older women

While statistics here in Australia and in the UK indicate the number of older women experiencing domestic violence is low, around 4-5 per cent of women aged over 45, (Office of Women's Policy 2002; Weeks & Oberin 2004; AIHW Marcolin 2005; Blood 2004) the limited research that exists and the experiences of service providers is that domestic violence affects considerable numbers of older women. In fact research in the US suggests the extent of women experiencing domestic violence is similar for both older and younger women (Women's Aid n.d).

While the experience of domestic violence *may* be lower for older women a number of reasons have been highlighted in the literature to explain why domestic violence among this group remains particularly hidden. In an excellent overview of older women and domestic violence by Women's Aid in the UK (Womens Aid n.d.) it is suggested reasons fall into two categories – older women are less likely to experience abuse or older women are less likely to report abuse. It is suggested that older women are less likely to disclose or report violence for a range of reasons including shame, fear of isolation, lack of financial resources, difficulty of leaving the home they have lived in for most of their lives, the responsibility of being the caregiver, fear of estrangement from children and/or grandchildren, lack of knowledge about services available; and lack of knowledge about the law and the entitlements available (Office of Women's Policy 2002; Women's Aid n.d). Commenting on the situation in the UK Blood (2004, p. 2) states:

> Before the 1970s, a range of cultural and social factors – combined with the fact that domestic violence was not considered a crime – led to many women 'suffering in silence'. For many women aged 50 or over, this is still the norm.

Some commentators have divided domestic violence against older women into three categories – domestic violence that started early in life and persists into older age; domestic violence that begins through entering into an abusive relationship later in life, and late onset domestic violence that begins in old age and can be linked to retirement, disability, sexual changes or the changing roles of family members (Women's Aid n.d.). One of the problems in identifying older women suffering domestic or family violence is the confusion that exists between the definition of domestic violence and elder abuse. Women's Aid comment 'older women experiencing domestic violence occupy an ambiguous space between two social issues. This may result in victims of abuse "falling between the cracks of the elder abuse and domestic violence systems"'. Mears (2002, p. 2) in a presentation to a 'violence against women' conference in Sydney stated:

> Unfortunately the domestic violence literature and elder abuse literature have developed separately, and the problem of violence against older women has been neglected by both groups of researchers.

With domestic and family violence being categorised as elder abuse 'the realities of the lives of older women are lost when **age alone** is seen as major factor precipitating abuse' (Hightower *et al* 2001 quoted in Mears 2002, original emphasis). The Elder Abuse Prevention Association Australia qualifies elder abuse as different from domestic violence in that elder abuse happens to older people in a dependent situation compared with domestic violence that occurs to older people with independent capacity. This is a fine line of distinction and McDermott's (1993) interesting article debating the difference between the terms 'elder abuse' and 'domestic violence' indicates that elder abuse can indeed be classified as domestic or family violence, but it can also be understood as 'embezzlement, medical malpractice, or caregiver stress'.

McDermott (1993, p. 8) stresses that in Australia it is important that domestic violence is recognised as part of elder abuse and that:

> the agencies who deal with marital discord and domestic violence should be ensuring that their services are accessible to older people. Our enquiries told us that there was very little communication between the professionals and advocates concerned with domestic violence and those concerned with aged care. As a result, the services for women escaping domestic violence are probably seen as irrelevant or inaccessible by many older women.

It is not only the inaccessibility of services that deters older women from seeking help. Blood (2004), the Victorian Office of Women's Policy (2002) and Womens' Aid (n.d.) in the UK suggest a number of reasons including:

- response of health and social work professionals and police as to the relevance of domestic violence services for older women;

- lack of knowledge of the resources available;

- services may not be appropriate for older women, for example refuges may be noisy and busy and lack facilities to cater for disability needs or complex health needs; and

- if older women are caring for grandchildren including teenage boys they may not able to be accommodated in refuges.

Faulkner and Beer (2008) also discuss the lack of financial resources among older people generally and the difficulty many older people have finding accommodation other than residential care. Old age alone no longer qualifies as a priority in public housing and most older people in Australia cannot afford private rental accommodation.

All of these issues create greater vulnerability to homelessness within the older age groups, and as the Australian population ages the reporting of incidences of domestic and family violence against older women and their vulnerability to homelessness can only be expected to increase.

4.1.2 Younger women and girls

Youth services indicate that young women and girls are a group in need. Many of these women are pregnant, have children or are trying to restore their family, because their child(ren) are in temporary care for one reason or another. In addition many of these women have complex issues including drug and substance abuse, poor ways of responding to authority, and lack of parenting and life skills. They may have experienced lifelong abuse and neglect – often from their parental family – and then from partners. For example, some think they should stay in their current relationship because this partner is not as abusive as the previous one. Many are unable to stay at a parent's home due to family abuse in the past; the parent's partner does not welcome them or their residence may affect a parent's income supports. A large proportion of these women have few reliable family networks and so they, and their very young children, tend to couch surf.

Housing and support options for this group of women are very limited. Youth refuges are available but only if young women are not accompanied by children; they can go into a family refuge but only if they have children present. Women trying to restore their families and regain custody of their children then are faced with significant accommodation issues – needing some sort of flexible and responsive housing option so that they can prove they can accommodate their children adequately while fighting to regain custody and so that they can adequately house their child(ren) after they regain custody.

Many young girls also have the additional issue of 'sexually transmitted debt' – debt inherited from a partner or a relationship with a former partner. Young women need a range of services including child care services to support them deal with crisis needs and to support them through what may be a very long process to improve their wellbeing for the future. Such support is also crucial to ensure the same behaviours are not perpetuated among the children of these young women and girls.

4.1.3 Women with disabilities

The consultations undertaken for this research and the growing body of national literature on domestic and a family violence and women with disabilities confirms that this diverse group of women **continue** to experience both high levels of domestic and family violence and have high levels of unmet needs in terms of access to domestic violence (and homelessness) services (WWDA 2008a; 2008b; 2007; Salthouse 2007; Salthouse & Frohmader 2004; see also the non-gender specific study by the NSW Ombudsman (2004) on who is excluded from SAAP services in NSW). Research by Weeks and Oberin in 2004 also commented on the issue of women with disabilities and domestic and family violence, noting:

Increased access to domestic violence services for women with a disability continues to be urgent. Some progress is illustrated, however it appears to be piecemeal, rather than systematic and widespread...A national association reported that: There is some evidence of local Domestic Violence crisis services making an effort to improve accessibility for women with disabilities. However, in the main, Domestic Violence services remain inaccessible to the vast majority of women with disabilities experiencing or at risk of experiencing violence. The issue of violence against women with disabilities continues to be ignored (p. 79).

Limited data exist on the extent of violence against women with disabilities in Australia, and statistics on women with disabilities accessing SAAP services for domestic and family violence reasons are not collected through the NDCA. **Including a disability indicator in the SAAP NDCA collection would clearly assist in improving community, sector and Government understanding of the extent of domestic and family violence among women with disabilities.** This must be an area of priority, particularly given that 20 per cent of Australian women have some form of disability and as domestic violence services are reporting an increasing proportion of older women presenting to their services and the prevalence of disability increases with age (ABS 2004).

Research on women with disabilities and domestic and family violence by Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) (Salthouse 2007; Salthouse & Frohmader 2004; WWDA 2008a; 2008b) suggests that women with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic and family violence than women without disability. They also experience violence more frequently and in more diverse ways.[6] Women with disabilities are also at significantly greater risk of violence because of a range of factors, including the physical and economic dependence of some women on the perpetrator of the violence. Often violence is perpetrated by a women's primary carer – who may be their partner, a family member or professional (paid) carer. Women with disabilities also tend to be subject to violence for longer periods of time. For many this is because they 'have considerably fewer pathways to safety' (WWDA 2008a). This is a significant issue for women with disabilities who require modifications to their home and who have to leave their homes because of such violence. The fact that domestic and family violence (and homelessness) services – including refuges and shelters – are not accessible (including physically) for women with disabilities reinforces the lack of safe pathways. A study of the physical accessibility of women's refuges in NSW for women in wheelchairs, for example, found that only 38 per cent were accessible (NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre 2003, p. 18). Accessibility, however, is not just about physical accessibility. It is also about other services women with disabilities may need, such as assistance with communication and some aspects of self-care, and certain aids and appliances (WWDA 2004; DV Vic 2008). It should also be noted here that exposure to domestic and family violence may indeed cause disability for some women.

The NSW Ombudsman's *Inquiry into Access to, and Exiting from, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program* commented on the need for addressing access to SAAP services generally for people with disabilities (2004, p. 44). The report of this inquiry confirms WWDA's concerns about crisis services, stating: 'There is a

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[6] These findings are reinforced in a number of overseas studies of women with disabilities and their exposure to violence (see Smith 2008 for a recent review of the literature on this issue).

clear need for prioritisation of disability access in SAAP planning and resourcing of SAAP agencies to improve their accessibility'.

The vulnerable position of women with disabilities affected by domestic and family violence is further compounded by continuing discrimination in the housing market and especially in the private rental market (on this issue see also Kroehn *et al* 2007). As noted in a recent paper on *Women, Health and Housing Assistance* by Baker and Tually (2008, p. 131):

> dwelling modifications for disability are sometimes not possible for private rental tenants because decisions regarding whether these modifications are allowed rest with the private landlord.

The vulnerability of women with disabilities is also compounded by the overrepresentation of women with disabilities among those living in poverty, among those with poor levels of education and in poorly skilled, low paid employment (or no employment at all) – affecting economic autonomy, and among the socially excluded (see Jennings' 2003 report on DVIRC's *Violence Against Women with Disabilities Project*).

WWDA have undertaken significant work in the area of domestic and family violence and women with disabilities, advocating on/for a range of actions needed to improve the situation for women with disabilities affected by domestic and family violence, including:

- community awareness of the impact and extent of domestic and family violence on women with disabilities and seeing women in this position as women in need of help first and not defined by their disability;

- broadening of the definition of domestic violence to include violence perpetrated by formal and informal carers of women with disabilities;

- empowering women with disabilities affected by domestic and family violence – through such things as supporting women into higher education and better employment opportunities, giving women autonomy to hire and fire carers/support staff, providing better support for women with mental health issues;

- improving the accessibility of domestic and family violence support services for women with disabilities, including ensuring that women with disabilities affected by domestic and family violence have access to transport to crisis services;

- ensuring portability in women's care/support packages if they need to leave their home and providing support to women with disabilities to stay safely at home if they wish to and are able, including outreach;

- training staff in crisis accommodation services to assist women with disabilities escaping violence;

- providing more and better housing options for women with disabilities generally, including women with disabilities affected by violence; and

- recognising disability and domestic and family violence as part of a Human Rights agenda.

(Salthouse 2007; Salthouse & Frohmader 2004; WWDA 2008a & b)

Many of these areas in need of action are similar to those raised in recent (and the first national) research on the needs of women with disabilities experiencing domestic violence in the UK (see Hague *et al* 2008). This research considers these actions as good practice in assisting women with disabilities affected by domestic violence.

Resources have been very recently developed for service providers assisting women with disabilities affected by domestic and family violence. These are WWDA's *Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities* (2007) and DVIRC's *Getting Safe Against the Odds – A Guide for Service Providers* (2008).[7] However, the roll out of specific assistance for women with disabilities will clearly require further resources from Government – both to fund improvements to the accessibility of services and to train staff in the sector to appropriately assist women with disabilities.

Improving the accessibility of Australia's housing stock for people with a disability generally is an area in need of further Government attention, and will also improve the situation for many women affected by domestic and family violence. Recent research by Tually, Beer and Faulkner (2007) and Tually (2008a) discussed the importance of introducing Universal Design[8] principles into the design of new built Australian housing, and social housing. The UK Government are working toward this outcome particularly in social housing as part of their national strategy for housing in an ageing society (see UK DfCaLG, DoH & DfWaP 2008). New and existing social housing will clearly assist women (and people) with disabilities generally in their daily lives, and when they need to move home for whatever reason.

4.1.4 Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Research (see, for example, Keys Young 1998a; Chung *et al* 2000; Aly & Gaba 2007; Office of Women's Policy 2002; DV Vic 2008) on women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds indicates that these women are generally much less likely than other groups of women to report cases of domestic violence and many experience barriers to accessing domestic violence support services including crisis accommodation services. Service providers, however, are seeing increased numbers of CALD women particularly from recent migrant groups seeking assistance. The issues identified include:

- the cultural position of women in some migrant groups leaves them at risk;

- a lack of knowledge about the Australian system of law and about domestic violence. A study by South Western Sydney Area Health Service and Central Sydney Area Health Service (Moore & Connelly 1999) measuring the attitudes to domestic violence in Arabic, Tongan, Vietnamese and Chinese communities found that domestic violence was considered an issue to be dealt with by the family. By using a publicity campaign and community information events community members were more likely to recognise domestic violence as a crime and understand that services were available;

- women from CALD backgrounds may not access services because of fear of losing their family (children) and community support networks;

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[7] DVIRC has also developed a guide for women with disabilities affected by/escaping domestic and family violence – *Getting Free From Abuse: A Guide for Women with Disabilities* (see http://www. dvirc.org.au/Disability/DisabilityIndex.htm).
[8] 'The design of products and environments to be useable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design' (Mace n.d.).

- increases in women who have recently arrived in Australia as part of a 457 visa. These visas are used by employers to employ overseas workers for a period of between three months and four years. Visa holders are allowed to bring secondary applicants who can work or study (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008a). Women who arrive with a male partner fear they will be deported or lose their children if they seek help;

- increases in the number of women on temporary visas (who have applied for a spouse visa – a visa granted because they married an Australian Citizen or permanent resident (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008b) who are reluctant to report domestic or family violence for fear they will not be able to remain in Australia. Though the partner is to provide sponsorship which includes 'all financial obligations to the Australian Government that your partner might incur while they are in Australia; agree to provide adequate accommodation and financial assistance as required to meet your partner's reasonable living needs; will provide financial and other support, such as childcare, that will enable your partner to attend any English classes they need; and will provide information and advice to help your partner settle in Australia' and this assistance is to cover the two years following the granting of the temporary partner visa (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008c), service providers comment that SAAP services are increasingly assisting and paying the costs of accommodating and supporting these women. Women on some types of temporary visas may not be eligible to work or receive income support and some cannot leave the country because of Family Court Orders concerning their children. SAAP services work with these women to enable them to gain permanent residency.

   It is suggested that if women on temporary and spouse visas need to seek shelter at a refuge then funding should be available to support them. This is a Human Rights issue;

- some services do not have the resources and therefore are not prepared for significant increases in women from CALD backgrounds;

- in many cases interpreter and translation services are poor. The need for interpreter services is increasing the load (financially and physically) on service providers in some States/Territories. There is a need for interpreters and translators who are skilled in domestic violence and the processes of accessing various services, court, AVOs, refuges and what they do, so that they have an idea of the services available;

- refuges may not be able to provide for the particular needs of CALD women. For example Aly and Gaba's (2007) research found that Muslim women often have real concerns that services are not culturally or religiously appropriate environments, i.e. with food preparation, prayer facilities or gender segregation of women and male children of certain ages;

- it is difficult to move immigrant groups from crisis services because of discrimination in the private rental sector and the high costs of private housing. Rental histories are difficult for newly arrived immigrants and those for whom the lease is in the husband's name. In addition some migrant women do not have adequate life skills to maintain a private rental tenancy; and

- the services available to migrant women vary considerably across Australia with some regions having very poor services to cater for the needs of these groups.

4.1.5 Women with large numbers of children

Some families, particularly recently arrived refugee and immigrant families, who experience domestic violence have four or more children. There is a lack of suitable affordable accommodation for these families. This group of women faces additional challenges if they have older boys in the family, as many services do not have the capacity to house families with older male children. Finding accommodation options for larger families was described as a particular challenge for service providers and in both the private market and in social housing.

4.1.6 Rural and regional women

A report by WESNET (2000), as part of the Partnership Against Domestic Violence initiative, outlines the issues confronting women in rural and regional areas in relation to reporting violence and seeking support. These issues include the tyranny of distance, isolation, lack of transport, increased availability of firearms, financial insecurity, fears about confidentiality and community attitudes and a lack of services within the area. Possible housing options are particularly limited as there is an overall shortage of accommodation in many rural and regional areas. Many of these issues – and particularly the lack of crisis support options for women in many rural and regional areas – were highlighted as continuing concerns in our consultations with domestic violence services for this report.

4.1.7 Women in (remote) mining communities

A regional domestic violence service contacted for this research pointed to a newly emerging group of women in need of specific attention and help – women living in remote mining communities. The representative of this service discussed the need for further services to assist women in this situation for a number of reasons. First, the domestic violence service she is involved with is assisting an increasing number of women in/from mining communities affected by domestic violence. She believed this to be a direct consequence of high levels of alcohol and drugs abuse among mine workers – the majority of whom are male and earn substantial incomes that allow them to support such abuse. Second, house prices in remote mining locations are especially over-inflated, limiting affordable housing options for women who want/need to escape domestic and family violence. Third, and most disturbingly, she pointed to the fact that her service has seen an increase in the number of women who have escaped domestic and family violence and moved away from their family home in a remote mining community – where there are no affordable housing options – and been forced back to their partners or the mining community (paying exorbitant rents) because of a court order stating that they cannot move away from their ex-partner with their children.

WESNET identified this group of women as in need of further assistance back in 2000 (WESNET 2000, p. 13) and in their 2004 report commented that 'Little progress has been identified in services for women in mining communities, and this continues to be viewed as a significant issue to be addressed and funded' (Weeks & Oberin 2004, p. 88). The consultations undertaken with this research – while very limited in regional areas – pointed to this as a continuing, and increasing, area of concern and need. The expansion of mines in certain areas of Australia and the growth in the number of mines, and of remote mining communities, means that the number of women in this situation in future years could well be significant. The impact of domestic and family violence on women (and children) in mining communities then is

an area clearly in need of further research – particularly to determine the extent of such violence, as well as to determine the capacity for crisis services to meet demand from women in this situation – if indeed such services exist in these communities for women.

4.1.8   Home owners

Though home owners would generally be considered to be in an advantageous position financially in relation to many women who suffer from domestic and family violence as in principle they have equity in a house/property, this may be inadequate to fund a new home, difficult to access, contested and expensive – especially to maintain on one income and if a court settlement process is involved. For some women their violent partner may also use their equity in their home before the woman has the time to secure her share, or it may be tied up with a business or farm, further complicating issues around settlement.

Women who have in the past received a First Home Owners Grant and fall out of home ownership due to domestic and family violence are also disadvantaged in the housing system because they are not again eligible for the First Home Owners Grant (FHOG). This important mortgage assistance is only available once regardless of circumstances. The eligibility criteria for the FHOG unnecessarily penalises women affected by domestic and family violence for their past choices and experiences.

4.1.9   Other groups in need

Other women identified as emerging groups both in the literature (Office of Women's Policy Government of Victoria 2002; Chung *et al* 2000) and from the consultations undertaken as part of this research are women with mental health problems, grandparents who parent children of violent partnerships resulting in pressures on their housing situation, lesbian and bisexual women, single women, women with addictions, and families with pets. Women with older male children (boys aged over 12) and who want to keep their families together were also identified as a group still in need of specific attention and assistance (also raised as an issue back in the late 1990s by Keys Young (1998a). This issue was also raised in terms of recently arrived women from CALD backgrounds with older male sons, particularly for those who have limited social networks in Australia and for whom being separated is traumatic for both mother and their children. More dispersed community based medium and longer term housing for women and their children in this position (i.e. not communal or congregational style housing) would assist women and their older male children in this situation.

The NSW Ombudsman's report *Assisting homeless people – the need to improve their access to accommodation and support services* (2004, Chapter three) also identified pregnant women (especially post-seven months gestation) and women declining case management[9] as among those often excluded from SAAP services in NSW. These groups are in addition to: people who use or posses drugs and/or alcohol; people with mental illness and people with disabilities; people with violent and challenging behavior; and people unable to pay rent or service charges. The recent report of findings from the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) for South Australia – *SA Drug Trends 2007* – found that:

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[9] i.e. wanting to stay very short-term in a refuge and move into stable accommodation away from the perpetrator of the violence against them and who do not consider themselves in need counseling

As in previous years, a few KE [key experts] reported substantial prevalence of domestic violence and assaults against women and children primarily associated with the use of methamphetamines (White, Vial & Ali 2008, p. 106)

Though not an emerging group, Indigenous women are a group in particular need and this is discussed further later in this report. WESNET's 2004 report identified Indigenous women as a group in particular need of further assistance, with Indigenous domestic and family violence services severely in need of additional resources to provide support for women (Weeks & Oberin 2004, p. 78). The lack of safe houses in remote areas and their non-existent operational funding was raised as a specific resourcing issue that must be addressed (see Chapter five of this report). The consultations undertaken for this report showed this remains the case today.

4.2   Conclusion

This section has highlighted the diversity of women in need of assistance and at risk of homelessness. While it is important to have an understanding of the needs that are specific to certain groups of women, a system of provision across each State and Territory that adequately caters to the majority of needs of all women, should with relative ease, be able to cater for the highly specific needs of certain women. At present, however, due to a lack of real funding (and no significant increases in operational funding in a decade) and significant decline in social housing, services are struggling to do anything but supply basic core functions. This is the case despite their commitment, will and potential in the domestic and family violence sector to do much more for women and for more women.

5.   Successful Strategies and Models

5.1   Prevention of Violence Related Homelessness

Preventing domestic and family violence related homelessness is not an easy task. The very nature of the pathway into homelessness because of domestic violence makes addressing this sort of homelessness difficult. Domestic violence related homelessness is reactive homelessness. As MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2003, p. 45) note:

> ...where domestic violence is involved, it is difficult to deliver 'early intervention' because many victims do not request assistance until they are forced to leave.

A substantial part of the solution in terms of strategies that prevent domestic and family violence related homelessness are those that **prevent** domestic and family violence from happening in the first place. Integrated national education and awareness campaigns both have a continuing role to play here. As Amnesty International's recent report *Setting the Standard: International Good Practice to Inform an Australian National Plan of Action to Eliminate Violence Against Women* (2008) states:

> The prevention of violence against women requires long-term strategies, such as education and public awareness-raising, to change deeply entrenched attitudes. In the area of prevention, education is the key. The development of an education program for implementation in every high school across Australia must be the cornerstone of the NPoA [National Plan of Action].

Chapter four of the Amnesty International report (2008) discusses the context and need for further work in terms of prevention and public awareness strategies in Australia. It also provides some good practice examples of such strategies.

Re-running the *Australia Says No to Violence* campaign, or developing a new campaign on non-tolerance of domestic and family violence, must be properly resourced and supported by all three tiers of Government. It must be federally spearheaded. Importantly, such a campaign must be adequately resourced, recognising that raising awareness of the extensive and on-going impact of domestic and family violence on Australians **will** increase demand on existing services.

Any education campaign on domestic and family violence needs to focus on educating women, men and children about respect for each other, how to develop and sustain healthy relationships within families and between partners, and how to deal with stressful circumstances and situations within households that often precipitate violence. An investigation of the types of education programs operating successfully around Australia at the local and state level, as well as internationally, would assist with determining the right approach for a new education campaign for school aged children. Online resources and lesson plans for teachers that are specific to children and youth of certain ages are needed. These could form part of the current or a renewed National Safe Schools Framework[10] or similar such strategy.

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[10] See http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/national_safe_schools_framework.htm

While Amnesty International (2008) and the newly established National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and Children (Plibersek 2008) see targeting high school students as the priority, there are also clear and defensible arguments for targeting an education program to primary school children as well. A primary school aged children program must be sensitive and age specific and not cause undue fear, concern or trauma among/to children. The urgent need and justification for an education program for primary school children is demonstrated by recent research that found that children who bully often learn such behaviour from witnessing violence in their home (DEST Safe at Schools Framework).

Early intervention strategies also clearly have a role to play in reducing the level of domestic and family violence related homelessness in Australia. However, Weeks and Oberin's 2004 study highlights service providers' concern about the lack of resources to provide early intervention: for 'services to reach out to women sufficiently early' (p. 30). They note that resources and early intervention strategies are needed not only for women who may make an initial enquiry about support, but also for women for whom admitting domestic violence is deeply shameful. For example, for older women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Further investigation and evaluation of the strategies and program in place in Australia and other parts of the world to prevent violence related homelessness is clearly needed in this regard.

As discussed earlier, the vast majority of women who end up homeless because of violence do so after reaching a crisis point, and because they have limited independent financial resources to support themselves and their children with accommodation expenses and other costs of living. Given the fact that access to independent financial resources and poverty are central characteristics of many women who end up homeless because of violence, **income support and strategies to assist women to secure appropriate employment are paramount**. Access to Centrelink's Crisis Payments (Centrelink 2008a) is important in this situation and this program clearly needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is accessible to those who need it. This issue was mentioned numerous times in the consultations for this project, with many representatives of the domestic violence sector commenting that many women do not know of the existence of this payment or their application for the payment is rejected, often repeatedly, when they are eligible. The role of Centrelink's Crisis Payments in discussed further in the final section of this report..

Another strategy that could potentially assist women in terms of economic independence is **setting up a national funding stream for women's refuges and shelters so that they can assist women with gaining access to employment through the provision of personal development assistance and improving their education and job seeking skills**. This strategy has been developed in the Republic of Ireland (funded through the European Social Fund[11]). It is identified by Amnesty International (2008) as an example of international good practice supporting women's economic independence. Many shelters and refuges in Australia already perform these functions for their clients but are not generally funded to do so. The provision of additional funds for staffing also needs to accompany this strategy. Alternatively, **the Federal and State Government's could provide additional brokerage funding to shelters and refuges so that these services can be provided for women**.

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[11] The European Social Fund (ESF) was set up to improve employment opportunities in the European Union and so help raise standards of living. See http://www.esf.gov.uk/introduction_to_esf/

Addressing the barriers to women's economic independence is raised in the Amnesty International report as an important means of preventing and reducing the impact of violence against women. As identified in the report (Amnesty International 2008, p. 46) and emphasised to the authors in the consultations for this report, income support programs and the mutual obligation and other conditions placed on such payments need to be reviewed to ensure that they do not compromise the safety of women and children or contribute to women's homelessness.

The welfare to work reforms introduced under the Howard Government, and particularly the 'part-time participation requirements'[12] placed on single mothers receiving parenting payment were mentioned as adding to the stress on women escaping or who had escaped domestic violence. This was particularly determined to be a detrimental policy change for women receiving parenting payment and child support from their former partner (the perpetrator of the violence against them) as for some women their partner was using their need to seek work, undertake education or work, to challenge whether they are appropriately caring for their children. Given that there are exceptions to mutual obligation/'participation requirements' for women affected by domestic and family violence, it seems that more needs to be done in this area to ensure that women affected by domestic violence (and workers in the domestic violence sector) are aware of such exemptions, and that Centrelink staff are both sensitive and efficient in establishing eligibility for an exemption on the grounds of violence.

The role of Centrelink in assisting women in domestic violence situations was raised many times in the interviews conducted for this report – and with mixed views. Many workers at the coalface in the sector feel that Centrelink staff are unnecessarily obstructive – particularly with the Crisis Payments (mentioned above), while others had established good links with Centrelink staff and offices. New flexibility in dealing with the processing of income support payments for women escaping domestic violence that allowed women to quickly and relatively easily go on and off support as they moved in and out of homelessness, were welcomed.

The Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVC) is currently undertaking research into the link between domestic and family violence and income. They believe, as do many in the sector, that the major cause of violence related homelessness is economic and 'the economic factors that drive women into homelessness due to domestic violence are preventable' (ADFVC 2008).

Recent changes to the Child Support Scheme and the *Family Law Act* (Cth) were repeatedly raised by participants in the consultations as two of the most damaging changes for many women escaping domestic violence in some years. Changes to the child support system were of concern for the sector and clients because of the rate of reduction in child support paid by the payer parent because of contact. These arrangements are seen to overly favour payer parents (mostly fathers) and significantly reduce the income of single mothers (McInnes 2008).

Concern was raised that changes introduced to the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) by the *Family Law (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006* are resulting in more women staying in unsafe relationships. The changes represent a significant 'generational shift' in family law and constitute an attempt to move family law issues away from an adversarial and litigation-based environment towards a family dispute resolution model, facilitated in Family Relationship Centres (for discussion see New South

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[12] 'Looking for or undertaking at least 15 hours of work per week and registration with a Job Network provider or undertaking approved study' when a parent's youngest child turns seven (Centrelink 2008b).

Wales Parliament Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice 2006; the recent report *Behind Closed Doors: Family Dispute Resolution and Family Violence* by Kirkwood for the DVIRC (2007); see also the AIFS report by Moloney *et al* (2007) *Allegations of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Family Law Children's Proceedings: A Pre-reform Exploratory Study*).

Several aspects of the new family laws fuel women's concern. First, there is a belief that it will be less practicable to raise issues of domestic or family violence in the environment of family dispute resolution. Second, the definition of domestic and family violence has been narrowed and now requires proof that fear of violence is 'reasonable'. Third, this change is accompanied by the threat of a costs order for 'false' allegations. Fourth, the presumption of shared parental responsibility, introduced by Section 61DA(2) of the amended 1975 *Act* is seen as difficult to displace and, even though this is not synonymous with 'equal parenting time' (addressed in section 65DAA), there is concern that in practice the two issues may be conflated together. There is also concern that community understanding of the 2006 reforms is patchy, imprecise and incomplete. This can lead to unrealistic expectations being asserted, adding to the crushing stress of already difficult proceedings. It seems necessary then that a broader education campaign and resources about the impacts of the changes to the *Family Law Act* on women (and their children) escaping domestic and family violence and the protections available to women in this situation must be undertaken, with such education to also extend to the domestic and family violence sector.

A range of opportunities exist for early intervention. These include: providing information and support to women at a range of well known risk points for domestic and family violence, i.e. during pregnancy; immediately post the birth of a first child or post the birth of every child for some women in longer-term violence situations; at ante and post natal services; and when a partner is incarcerated for a drug or alcohol related issue (men should also be provided with information on zero tolerance of violence at this time, and on behaviour change programs). Health services have a particular role here – particularly GPs and staff of emergency departments. GPs and emergency departments are often the front line in detection of domestic and family violence, as such proper training of these health care professionals and provision of domestic and family violence resources for them is essential and should be part of a national campaign to prevent violence against women.

The police and courts also have an important role to play in terms of early intervention. Police, for example, should provide information on who to contact for victims of domestic disturbances as a matter of procedure, as well as providing information in an appropriate manner on legal protections for women, such as AVOs or exclusion orders. What would clearly help here is police providing a checklist/information brochure on available services and options for women in a local area/State. The information card used to inform women about their options for the Staying Home Leaving Violence program is a potential model for this.[13] Family law courts are also a potential place for early intervention – and could direct women to appropriate counselling and support services to cope with the trauma of violence as well as to point women to the right services to contact for legal assistance. Placing a dedicated domestic violence support worker in courts on particular days of the week – as the Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service in Victoria were reported as doing back in 2004 at Ringwood Magistrates Court to ensure women have the appropriate exclusion provisions in their Intervention Orders – is another model

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[13] See http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/1ED335DD-6CD5-4ECC-9572-180FF5CA788F/0/stayingHome.pdf

worthy of further investigation to determine the effectiveness of this support mechanism for women (see DVIRC 2004, p. 23). Family Relationship Centres should also provide women affected with domestic and family violence with information about such violence – and particularly the risk of violence at separation, and services to assist women and their children.

Because of the tight timeframe for this research further investigation of these strategies was not possible. It is therefore the recommendation of the authors of this report that **the Office for Women commission or undertake more detailed research on these early intervention strategies in terms of their success and broad application.** Early intervention is clearly an area where more comprehensive work is needed to determine appropriate actions to be followed.

5.1.1   One response: safe at home programs

Arguably one of the most appropriate strategies for *preventing* violence related homelessness are those termed the 'staying safely at home' housing models (also referred to as safe at home models, staying home safely or, as in NSW, the Staying Home Leaving Violence project). The models describe relatively new programs (and necessary and related integrated support) that remove and exclude the perpetrator of violence against women (and children) from the home, allowing women and children to stay in their own homes – preventing them from becoming homeless (discussed in detail in Chung *et al* 2000; Edwards 2004; McFerran 2007; see also Housing NSW 2007). **Safe at home models are premised on the fact that the perpetrator of the violence should be held accountable for their actions and removed from the family home, thereby not penalising the women and children for the violence against them**.

Before discussing this model in detail it should be noted upfront that there was contention in the domestic violence sector around this model of assistance for women affected by domestic and family violence, and especially around the UK Sanctuary Model also discussed in this section. The reasons for concern over these models are also given in the following discussion.

The NSW Government has been most active in developing and trialling safe at home models in Australia, and has recently committed to funding 16 Staying Home Leaving Violence Projects across the state (Bega Women's Refuge 2007). The roll out of these projects follows the success of three pilots across the state: in Bega (auspiced by the Bega Women's Refuge and funded through SAAP), Eastern Sydney (auspiced by the Homelessness Unit, Housing NSW) and Western Sydney (funded by the National Community Crime Prevention Program and auspiced by WASH House, Mt Druitt[14]) (VAW Specialist Unit 2007; WASH House 2008).

The Bega Staying Home Leaving Violence Project succinctly summarises the rationale for the project:

> Why have we expected the women and children who are the ones suffering from domestic violence, to be the ones who leave the home? "Why doesn't she leave?" "The home is a man's castle". Not any longer. Across Australia changes are occurring to make the home safer and to remove the violent partner.

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[14] Women's Activities and Self Help House – a community based resource centre for women, offering support, information and referral for women (see http://www.washhouse.org.au/).

As Edwards' seminal research into staying safe at home models (2004) contends: these models are about challenging traditional assumptions about women leaving domestic violence, i.e. that

- leaving the violence means having to leave home;

- staying at home is not safe for women; and

- the perpetrator of the violence will not leave the family home (from Edwards 2004).

The features of the Staying Home Leaving Violence Project (SHLV) are summarised in Housing NSW's 2006-07 Annual Report (2007, p. 52):

> SHLV workers provide outreach support and advocacy so that women have greater choice when leaving violent relationships and are better able to sustain housing, economic security and support networks. The program includes risk assessment, safety planning and upgrading security in the victim's home, court support, liaison with police and other services, referrals to legal advice and counselling to address financial and other issues.

The NSW pilots, as with safe at home models generally, are about wrapping support around women to ensure they can stay safely in their home. An important and necessary feature of the programs is risk assessment (by police and/or other services). For many women improvements are made to the physical security of their home, e.g. changing locks, installing phone alarms et cetera. Simple and cost effective measures to improve the security and safety of women staying at home, and their perception of safety.

A case study of a woman assisted to remain in her home through the Staying Home Leaving Violence Project in Inner Sydney reported in Housing NSW's 2005-06 Annual Report is worth reproducing here, as it demonstrates the type of support provided through the program (see Box 5.1).

The success of staying safely at home models for some women is also demonstrated in the UK. In this case such schemes are known as Sanctuary Schemes (see Box 5.2). The schemes are generally delivered by local authorities, as one strategy to meet their obligations to address local homelessness. Funding for the schemes is sourced from central government, from general funds to address homelessness across the UK.

Sanctuary Schemes in the UK have recently received high level political support as a strategy to reduce domestic and family violence related homelessness, with the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announcing that she wants all local authorities in the UK to offer such Schemes as a housing option (Kelly 2006). A paper outlining the *Options for Setting up a Sanctuary Scheme* has been published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2006) and usefully outlines the safety improvements made to homes, how the program is funded and gives some indication of success rates for the Scheme.

Box 5.1: Case study – Staying Home Leaving Violence Project, Sydney, NSW

Helen is a 31-year-old woman with two teenage sons, and a nine-year-old daughter who has physical and intellectual disabilities. Helen and her husband had been living in public housing for three years when Department of Housing staff referred her to the Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) program.

Helen's husband had physically assaulted her, and the police charged him. The court also issued an AVO, which included the condition that he was prohibited from returning to the house.

Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) talked to Helen about whether staying in her home was a safe option for her and her children, and they assessed the risks. Even though there was a history of physical, emotional and financial abuse, it was very important for Helen to stay in her home so she could be near her daughter's doctors and her local school.

She also wanted to be close to her family and other support services. The SHLV program staff supported Helen during the court proceedings and visited her at home to help develop a safety plan for emergencies.

They discussed strategies to help her be safer at home, and installed an alarm, a screen door and a sensor light. They also helped her to work out some of her financial difficulties, helped her find legal advice, and arranged counselling for her sons.

After six months with the program, Helen said, "Staying Home Leaving Violence has helped me to realise that I am not the one who has to get up and run, that I can stay in my home with my children and feel safe. I have become a stronger person, and I can pay rent and bills on my own. I have realised that I don't have to put up with violence, and that I deserve better in my life, and my children do as well."

Source: Housing NSW 2007

While the staying safe at home models have had, and are clearly having, success in terms of preventing violence related homelessness for women **the models do not suit all women, and do not purport to do so**. As noted from the UK experience to date:

> A Sanctuary Scheme is just one of a range of options that should be presented to those experiencing domestic violence who are at risk of homelessness – they will **not** be appropriate or safe in all instances (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 7, original emphasis).

Moreover, it needs to be remembered that Sanctuary Schemes are not instant responses to the housing circumstances of women and assessing their risks and developing safety plans. The UK programs average two weeks to set up, meaning some form of temporary accommodation is needed for women in the interim (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 23).

Safe at home models therefore are about **providing choice for women in lower risk violence situations**. Women and children in extreme risk of violence from their partner or family member will not benefit from these models. These facts are reinforced in the evaluation of the Bega pilot in NSW which found that certain key factors are necessary for the success of the program (Bega Women's Refuge 2007; Edwards 2004). These are:

- protocols in place between key agencies involved in dealing with and assisting women in a domestic violence situation to ensure a coordinated response to violence. The Bega Pilot relies heavily on a Memorandum of Understanding between police and domestic violence services and relevant referrals between these parties to assist women;

Box 5.2:   Safe at home models – Sanctuary Schemes, UK

Sanctuary Schemes

What is the Sanctuary Scheme?

'The Sanctuary Scheme is a victim centred initiative and is an innovative approach to homelessness prevention. It is designed to enable victims of domestic violence to remain in their own accommodation, where it is safe for them to do so, where it is their choice and where the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation' (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 6).

'A sanctuary scheme provides a safe room, or sanctuary, within a home fitted with safety measures, including the; installation of alarms; mortice locks; security lights; reinforced door frame; emergency lights; and CCTV. This gives the victim the confidence and security to stay in their own home, if they wish and the partner no longer lives there.

The addresses with a safe room will be flagged on police computers to ensure a swift response if an incident occurs. The courts can help with non-molestation orders, occupation orders, and transfer of tenancy. This is just part of a comprehensive strategy the Government has in place including a stepping up of prosecutions of perpetrators' (Kelly 2006).

As mentioned in *Options for Setting up a Sanctuary Scheme* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 20), fire safety assessments are an important part of the Scheme and 'Consideration should always be given to Fire Services access and where possible, sanctuary rooms located at the front of properties to facilitate rescue'.

Eligibility

The Department for Communities and Local Government (2006, pp. 10-14) states a preference for Schemes to be free of charge and available across tenures, with data from an early Scheme in Harrow indicating around 30 per cent of referrals for the Scheme were for private renters and owner occupiers. The only eligibility for the program should be that the agency referring a women for the Scheme (police, domestic violence agency et cetera) is satisfied that without the Scheme the women would be homeless.

Of course, conducting an objective individual risk assessment is also a key part of determining the appropriateness of this housing option for women and their children.

Local authorities report average costs per sanctuary home of between £750 and £1000 (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 24).

Benefits

Evidence on benefits from the early program in the UK are evidenced in Barnet where Barnet Council's Housing Needs and Resources Section set up 40 Sanctuaries in 2004–05 (of 45 approved) resulting in 40 per cent fewer families being housed in temporary accommodation because of domestic violence. The total cost for the Sanctuary Schemes was £68,461, significantly less than the £669,760 per year it would have cost to house the women (and children) in temporary accommodation. Importantly, clients assisted through the Scheme reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, as well as a high feeling of security (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 16).

'A Sanctuary Scheme can be a positive response by a local authority to prevent homelessness where someone is faced with domestic violence, **when** properly developed through a close working partnership of all key local agencies **and** where it is the option **chosen** by the victim. It should also be noted that, aside from the obvious safety aspects and social benefits associated with allowing a victim to stay in their own home, the cost of installing a sanctuary is likely to be considerably less than placing a victim and any children in temporary accommodation' (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 5, original emphasis).

The Scheme is seen to offer a series of social and personal benefits for the women for whom the Scheme is appropriate, such as maintaining their connection with social networks and local community services such as GPs, children's schools, et cetera (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 14).

Other issues

The UK Government recognises that an important part of the response for the Sanctuary Scheme for local authorities and housing associations is using tenancy agreements to end joint tenancies where violence has occurred and to grant a sole tenancy to the survivor of violence where appropriate (see Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 13).

Sources: Department for Communities and Local Government 2006; Kelly 2006

- provision of outreach support;

- development of individual safety plans for women (and children) to determine necessary home security improvements;

- promotion throughout the community of staying at home as a safe option for women and children affected by domestic violence; and

- continual assessment and evolution of the program based on program evaluation, including evaluation of outcomes from clients.

The earlier evaluation of the NSW pilots found that the strength of attachment women had to their homes – and their violent partner being removed from the home by police or court order or leaving voluntarily because he had an alternative housing option – assisted women to remain in their homes and feel safe (Edwards 2004, p. 4).

The Sanctuary Schemes in the UK have also found that:

> If there is any question of compulsion [for women] the scheme will not work (Department for Communities and Local Government 2006, p. 5).

The introduction of stay at home models also provide outreach support for women who can remain safely at home. Outreach is a central feature of Sanctuary Schemes in the UK. In the Australian context therefore, additional funds will need to flow on to the domestic violence sector for outreach to support these types of programs. The Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse has been quite vocal on this issue, recommending that the Federal Government establish an Australian Home Security Fund which organisations coordinating safe at home models can access to pay for security modifications to homes. This seems a logical approach that the Federal Government needs to take to support the implementation of safe at home models as a housing option for some women, and something that can be implemented relatively easily. Alternatively, Governments will need to increase the brokerage funds available to the domestic violence sector for outreach and other support for women staying at home – as is needed across the sector generally.

McFerran (2007) in her overview of integrated models which deal with violence and subsequent homelessness notes that staying safe at home models must be delivered as part of an integrated regional domestic violence strategy. This point was strongly made in the evaluation of the Bega Staying Safe Leaving Home Pilot (see Bega Women's Refuge 2007, p. 10). Such approaches to addressing violence related homelessness, as with approaches to addressing violence related homelessness generally, are unlikely to be effective unless backed up at all levels by efficient and meaningful legislation which allows the perpetrator of the violence to be removed legally from the home. In this respect the priority of the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women to harmonise and toughen State and Territory domestic violence and sexual assault laws is necessary and must be a Federal Government priority.

Women left in their homes need to be fully supported, legally and socially and have trust in the system in place. In Victoria this has been enacted, according to McFerran (2007 pp. 9-15), in part due to the strong leadership and support for addressing the impact of domestic and family violence from Victoria Police and particularly from the Victorian Police Commissioner. These models are all only as successful as the legal framework and the local administrations allow them to be (on this issue see the excellent paper on housing options for women escaping domestic and family violence by McFerran 2007). The role of the police is essential in ensuring the successful

implementation of the model. Police and courts must also be sympathetic to the aims of the staying safe at home model and have positive and continuing roles with those involved. Trust between all parties is fundamental. This strength of the programs is also a weakness, as the pilot Staying Home Leaving Violence programs in NSW have shown that staff continuity, and trust in such staff by women, is crucial.

The integrated approaches to addressing domestic violence in the Victorian *Women's Safety Strategy* (Office of Women's Policy 2002); ACT's *Family Violence Intervention Project* (ACT Government 2003) and Tasmania's *Safe at Home* strategy (DoJaIR 2003) all promote staying safe at home as a choice for women. The strategies are important State/Territory developments and considered by the domestic violence sector generally to be examples of evolving best practice. Importantly, they in many ways re-orient past domestic violence support, placing responsibility for the violence with the perpetrator. The Victorian strategy includes both outreach support as a key factor in assisting women affected by domestic and family violence – whether staying safe at home is an option for them or not, and domestic violence agencies in that state have access to additional brokerage funds that can be used for a range of support for women, including to pay for security modifications to women's homes to make them secure. For these reasons evaluations of the Victorian *Women's Safety Strategy* are being (and should be) closely monitored to demonstrate the importance of an integrated system of support for survivors of domestic violence.[15]

It must be noted here that staying safely at home is not a workable option for many women escaping domestic violence, and will only realistically assist a small proportion of affected women. That said, staying safe at home **is clearly an option that women should be offered, and an important reorientation of past ways of assisting some women affected by domestic violence**. The message these programs send to the perpetrators of violence, and the community generally, is an important one: that **violence should never be tolerated and the perpetrators of violence should be held accountable for their behaviour**. In some cases such accountability will be demonstrated by them losing their right to their housing, thus prioritising the safety of the 'victim(s)' of the violence. **The programs require high levels of integration, cooperation and collaboration from a range of partners and continuity in commitment to the principles of the model and in terms of the staff involved** (McFerran 2007, p. 7).

Importantly, with these models women must be assisted in whatever ways they need to stay safely at home – and for many this will also mean outreach support and income support. Safe at home models will only be successful if women can afford the rent or outstanding mortgage payments (or negotiate a lower payment with their financial institution) they are left with in their home, and where any breach of a domestic violence order by the perpetrator is treated seriously. The models work particularly well for social housing tenants, where rent is set as a proportion of income, and where a tenancy agreement can be altered because of a domestic violence incident – making the victim of the violence the sole tenant or enacting some other change to the tenancy agreement to meet the needs of the affected woman. For women in the private rental market or living in a home over which they have a mortgage it seems fair to assume that assistance will also be needed with their housing costs – particularly while they re-establish their life post-violence and for those women with limited economic resources and/or with significant caring

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[15] A progress report of the Victorian Women's Safety Strategy was undertaken in 2005 (Office of Women's Policy 2005). A review has also recently been undertaken of the *Family Violence Act* (Tas), the legislation central to Tasmania's Safe at Home strategy (Urbis 2008).

responsibilities that have/do limit their labour force participation.[16] The Federal **Government could assist here by making available some sort of assistance with housing costs** – a grant, loan or rent assistance payment/additional rent assistance payment for a particular period of time. This would allow women to stay safely in their own home, reducing disruption to their children if they have any, and allow them some level of affordable housing security and time to make decisions regarding their longer term housing future, as well as their employment and financial position/needs. Of course, this type of assistance is not just needed by women for whom staying safe at home is a workable option. **Such assistance is needed by most women escaping domestic violence and should be looked at as a policy priority – particularly given the length of time it currently takes to be allocated a social housing property (where affordability is guaranteed) and as rents in the private rental market and the size and costs of servicing housing loans have escalated rapidly, and continue to do so in some areas of the country**. The Family Violence Private Rental Brokerage Program being offered by Domestic Violence Outreach Services in some locations in Victoria as part of the Women's Safety Strategy (Office of Women's Policy 2003) presents a possible model for assistance for women in the private rental market. This program was widely praised by the domestic violence services contacted in Victoria.

5.1.2   Other issues and needs

In discussing the issue of preventing violence related homelessness, it is important to also reiterate that a significant proportion of women who experience domestic and family violence return to live with the perpetrator of the violence/abuse against them, and many women do this many times. As such, women often cycle in and out of homelessness, and for some women this may be a long-term process, extending over a number of years. Importantly, this cycling in and out of homelessness is also often part of the pathway out of abuse for women, as repeated contact with domestic violence services builds their strength and trust in such services. It also allows women to have the necessary support wrapped around them while they make the choice to leave the perpetrator. This point was strongly made by the workers at the coalface of the domestic violence sector. These workers, and the sector generally, feel that women returning to domestic violence services (often 'spasmodically') over time is not an indication of failure – on the part of either the woman involved or for domestic violence services generally. Instead it is, and should be acknowledged by Governments as a step towards a permanent break from homelessness for some women.

Women who return to the perpetrator of the violence against them and cycle in and out of homelessness over a period of time and those who return and stay put, need support to deal with their experience of violence, to objectively assess the level of risk of future violence and to assist them with understanding and developing healthy relationships. For these women outreach services are clearly necessary. As past PADV research notes:

> Women who return home to the perpetrator of their violence may also need support. Outreach is important in this regard, as is ensuring that women in this situation are aware of the assistance available to help them if the need arises in the future (Office for the Status of Women and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2001, p. 17).

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[16] On this issue see Tually (2008b); Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability (2008).

Outreach services are currently only provided in a systematic way in Victoria, with limited outreach also in South Australia. More funding is needed for these services, and particularly to help women and children affected by domestic violence in Indigenous communities and rural and remote areas, and for men perpetrating violence.

There is some debate within the domestic violence literature and sector about the role of working with the perpetrators of domestic and family violence against women (mostly male partners) as a strategy for increasing women's safety and security, and preventing the re-occurrence of violent and abusive behaviour. The Victorian government is at the forefront of this policy intervention with the announcement in 2005 of the provision of funding for such programs. While men's programs have been in existence for over two decades the philosophy supporting these programs has changed over time from anger management to attempting to modify behaviour and making men accountable for their actions. These programs need to meet the No to Violence Standards of safety, accountability, quality assurance, public information and facilitate the safe expansion of the programs (Wheeler 2005). No to Violence considers the provision of behaviour change programs for men as:

> an integral component of the community response to family violence. Ultimately these groups are aimed at preventing family violence through changes in the attitudes and behaviour of male participants, and through the challenges these men can go on to make to the attitudes and behaviour of other men and to the overall community response to violence (No To Violence 2008).

As women's safety and security is central to this program women's domestic violence service providers have taken on the responsibility to run these programs. While welcoming these programs there is some concern within the sector regarding their expansion across the country. Such programs require experienced and trained facilitators and the development of the model too quickly may result in facilitators without the requisite skills, potentially placing women and children affected by violence at risk. No To Violence has developed a series of detailed minimum standards and good practice guidelines for men's behaviour change programs and a Men's Behaviour Change Group Work: A Manual for Quality Practice.[17]

Three final points need to be made here. First, the consultations for this project with people working at the coalface of domestic violence **revealed a degree of caution around staying safe at home models**. Such concerns were primarily because these models can, and will in reality, only assist a small proportion of women with their housing options, and, as such, there is concern in the sector that implementing these models will direct already overstretched resources away from other housing and support options working for the majority of women. **Ensuring that risk assessments are adequately carried out in an objective manner is also a concern among some in the sector. The implementation of these models is likely to require new Government funding**.

Second, and related, while there are some evaluations of staying safe at home models, these models are a relatively new addition to the housing options being undertaken to address violence related homelessness. In fact the consultations for this project and the literature revealed a dearth of evaluations of these and other

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[17] See http://www.ntv.org.au/pages/men-s-behaviour-change/detailed-standards-and-guidelines.php

programs to assist women affected by domestic and family violence. This is an issue that has been widely discussed. The Southern Domestic Violence Service in SA commented in recent research into good practice in working with Aboriginal women and children experiencing family violence:

> while there has been considerable money and resources devoted to this issue, much of the work happens without recognition. Those doing the work do not have the time to document or evaluate the work that they are doing or the knowledge that they have gained (SDVS & Nunga Mi:Minar 2007, p. 12).

WESNET's 2004 (Weeks & Oberin 2004, p. 4) report also emphasised the importance of evaluation, commenting that

> there is a scarcity of funded service and practice evaluations, which might document the detail of successful and innovative programs and approaches, especially those that draw on the experience of service-users.

Regular and comprehensive evaluation of new and existing models must be built into the funding arrangements for all initiatives and programs.

Finally, and as Ludo McFerran of the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse commented in a recent discussion paper identifying Australian and international models aimed at reducing violence related homelessness (McFerran 2007, p. 16), finding details of the workings of models is difficult; possibly a reflection of the lack of resources available to promote new and working initiatives, as well as to evaluate their progress and broader applicability.

5.2   Support and Accommodation for Women

The discussion in this section focuses on the most successful models and strategies that provide support and accommodation for women (and their accompanying children) who become/are homeless because of domestic and family violence. These models and strategies include: refuges; outreach support; adequate transitional accommodation and, arguably most importantly of all, **safe, secure and affordable long-term housing**, including social housing and affordable private rental and home ownership options. The appropriateness of each of these options varies among and between women, and is influenced by such factors as socioeconomic and cultural background and age. As the discussion notes, rural and remote Indigenous women affected by family violence, for example, generally require a very different response from non-Indigenous women. Adequately resourced and staffed safe houses and cooling off places are identified as one of the successful, preferred and culturally appropriate housing/support models for Indigenous women and children.

For women who are unable to stay safely at home a continuum of housing and support is required, including outreach support. This continuum must provide housing and support at the time of the crisis (or tipping point into homelessness) and for as long as is required by each woman, including after she has been housed in appropriate long-term accommodation. Consultations with the sector undertaken as part of this research, reveal that at the current time, the severe deficit in exit points from emergency and transitional accommodation (two points along the continuum to permanent housing) into permanent accommodation means this process is and can take up to two years.

5.2.1 Refuges/shelters and the continuum of support

Refuges or shelters as they are sometimes called are a **vital** SAAP funded accommodation option within the domestic and family violence sector. Demand for places within shelters continues to outstrip supply, and by a considerable amount.

The role of these services has changed considerably over time. Shelters have developed from small scale services (some were just a single building, house or flat) to what are now often 'a complex set of administrative arrangements, buildings, support and housing arrangements' (Weeks & Oberin 2004, p. 24). They provide a range of services such as safety planning, offering children's programs, and offering women's support groups and other specific programs for women such as home support and housing advocacy. Most shelters also provide:

> …a range of critical services to women and children. This includes crisis and short term accommodation, 24 hr information and referral services, court support and advocacy, support groups, support for children and outreach services. Emergency goods and transport can also be provided, along with various other services (from Women's Refuge group of WA undated booklet *Women's Refuge in the Community* quoted in Weeks & Oberin 2004, p. 44).

Refuges generally provide communal living arrangements or cluster housing models. For the most part, these two models suit the needs of different groups of women and their circumstances. In addition many refuge services also provide transitional accommodation (discussed further below).

Not all women seek help from or access a refuge. The Keys Young report *Against All Odds: How Women Survive Domestic Violence* (1998a) identified the reasons for this as:

- limited access both from a locational and capacity perspective;

- some women do not like the rules in place in some refuges; and

- inability to accommodate particular women's needs, such as for women with disabilities or specific cultural needs.[18]

The consultations conducted for this research also highlighted other reasons women remain in precarious situations rather than seeking accommodation assistance through a refuge; aside from not knowing of their existence or how to access such support. These include: women not wanting to leave their home, or move away from family and friends and/or not wanting to disrupt their children's schooling. Some women also do not want to live in refuges because they do not like communal living situations. This said, the consultations revealed that women's accommodation preferences were strongly correlated with their stage in the life course. Communal living arrangements generally work best for, and are preferred by, younger women escaping violence, who appreciate the support networks they can build with other women (and children) around them. Older women, on the other hand, have a stronger preference for more independent living, preferring individual properties. A

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[18] Points reinforced in recent work by on domestic violence and women with disabilities by Salthouse (2007) and by Jennings (2003) and on the needs of CALD women affected by domestic and family violence by Aly & Gaba (2007) and in Bonar & Roberts (2006).

range of crisis accommodation options is therefore needed to accommodate the preferences of different women.

Refuges are designed to be a short term 'crisis' housing option, providing accommodation and support for up to three months. However, the lack of exit points from shelters has turned many of them into much longer term accommodation options than they were/are designed to be. One service provider commented that when she started working in the sector it took six to eight weeks to get a woman (and her children) housed whereas now it is more likely to be two years.

The lack of capacity to meet the ever-increasing demand for housing in the medium and especially long-term has affected the flow and speed of movement of women through and out of refuges and transitional housing. The fundamental consequence of this is that many women are turned away from shelters each day, as their accommodation needs cannot be met. One participant in the consultations summed this up by saying 'there is no room at the inn', others commented that the system is 'blocked' and 'clogged'. As has been widely discussed and recognised in the Government's Green Paper (Commonwealth of Australia 2008) the major cause of blockages in the SAAP responses for women escaping domestic and family violence (and for homeless people generally) is the lack of exit points into social housing – where affordability is benchmarked, but the number of properties is decreasing and despite clear need for such housing from many vulnerable groups and individuals. **The need to increase social housing options for women in domestic violence related homelessness was the overriding discussion point in most consultations, with options needed in both traditional public housing and also in community housing** – in both association and cooperative housing models. The immediacy for increasing the capacity of the social housing sector was seen as all the more pressing given the current escalating cost of housing in the private sector, especially in the lower cost end of the private rental market where options are limited, competition for tenancies is fierce and costs are escalating (Yates, Wulff & Reynolds 2004). The current housing crisis – and housing being the most unaffordable in the 22 years since affordability records for home purchase and rental options have been kept (Dyett in ABC News 2008)[19] – is clearly impacting on the housing careers and movements of women out of SAAP accommodation and into appropriate or safe, secure and affordable permanent housing – a fundamental human right (see Tually 2008c). Access to affordable and safe housing is absolutely fundamental for women escaping domestic violence and for whom their home is an unsafe place to live to re-build and re-establish their lives (Tually 2008a).

The Victorian publication - *Developing an Integrated Response to Family Violence in Victoria — Issues and Directions*, (DVIRC 2004), identifies the pressures which exist on services and the fact that not only is demand for domestic and family violence services increasing, so too is the range of violations against women and the complexity of women's needs.

Weeks and Oberin (2004) also make the important point that the lack of resources in the domestic violence sector continues to limit the ability of the sector to add to or take up offers of more housing; further reducing sector-wide capacity to meet demand. Some services have partnered with other organisations, including philanthropists, charities and other government and non-government organisations to increase the range of services and accommodation options available. However, as

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[19] On the issue of housing affordability see Yates & Gabriel 2006, Yates *et al* 2007 and the recent work by Tually for Security4Women, which includes some statistics on levels of housing stress among female headed single parent and lone person households (Tually 2008a & c).

mentioned in the consultations, most services simply don't have the resources to fund the costs of maintaining and managing additional properties or to pay additional staff to meet ever-increasing and more demanding workloads.

A lack of permanent housing options places increasing pressure on refuges and the need to find medium term transitional housing. While many services own/manage transitional properties, a lack of housing options at this stage – when women are still very vulnerable, and often highly traumatised – increases the likelihood that they may move into 'unsavoury' arrangements. Moreover, they may lose contact with domestic violence services, leaving them without ongoing counselling/outreach support.

Of importance in the continuum of housing options is the need to minimise the number of times women (and their accompanying children) must move before they are housed permanently. Moving is very disruptive to women's lives, and is especially unsettling for children (changing schools, leaving friends et cetera). Bartholomew (2002) argues that transitional housing systems are by their nature problematic. This is because while they provide accommodation, and often develop the living skills of women (through learning budgeting et cetera), there is an assumption that all women will have an increased potential to move into permanent housing after their time in transitional housing. The fact is that for many women this is not the case. Many women who are homeless because of domestic and family violence are highly traumatised because of their experience and this can, and does, affect their capacity to adequately meet and undertake certain everyday activities, including household budgeting, minimising debt et cetera. Some women have also never had to manage their household and personal finances, let alone apply for or hold down paid employment, and this may have been part of their abuse. An important part of the move from crisis into transitional housing is the recognition of these challenges for women – which many refuges and domestic violence services already do, with some offering extensive life skills and other education programs. Funds must be available to assist women to develop the skills and capacities they need to rebuild their lives.

Consultation with the domestic violence sector – and the relevant literature – supports the critical role of, and need for, refuges or shelters and transitional accommodation as options on a continuum of support (including housing support) for women in domestic and family violence related homelessness. These services are central to women being able to re-build and re-establish their lives, post-violence and its damaging impacts. However, as Bartholomew notes 'Placing families into crisis, emergency, short term transitional housing and then recording such exercises as successful is fundamentally flawed' (Bartholomew 2002, p. 13). These important and necessary options for women, can and will only deliver permanent success if they are part of a continuum of support that includes a pathway into permanent, safe and affordable accommodation. The length of time women are considered homeless also depends on clear transitions and progression along the continuum of support.

Before moving on to discuss a clearly working and workable strategy to support Indigenous women affected by or escaping domestic and family violence, and as this report is fundamentally about the housing options and supports that best assist women in violence related homelessness, it would be remiss not to mention here the (increasing) role of motels in accommodating women. The use of hotels, motels and caravan parks as a form of crisis accommodation is not seen by the service sector as a suitable solution for any group of women. Despite this, Weeks and Oberin's (2004, p. 40) study of 137 service providers across the country in late 2003 found that 41 per cent of providers had resorted to such accommodation to deal with extra demand. This is particularly so in South Australia, where motels are often used to

accommodate women (and children) while a crisis or transitional accommodation place is located. The SA Government has a six night maximum on motel nights – as they are considered too costly, however, evidence from the sector in SA reveals that this limit is not always able to be met because of the strain on services.

The use of motels as a crisis accommodation option also taxes the minimal brokerage funds domestic violence services are provided with and that are used to pay for essential needs for women (transport, food, clothing et cetera). Motels are also seen as providing inappropriate space for children, inappropriate (non-existent) kitchen and laundry facilities, are unsafe and are isolating, as there are no support services attached to motels as there are with refuges. Weeks and Oberin (2004, p. 125) claim placing women and children in hotels, motels and caravan parks 'is a totally inadequate service response to women and children suffering the socio-emotional impact of the experience of domestic and family violence'. They state that this practice 'verges on system neglect', and if motels must be used then it is essential that support services are provided to women while they are accommodated in them.

Motels are also not considered as an adequate option for the perpetrators of violence against women by many in the domestic violence sector. Primarily this is because men can come and go as they please from motels, without any supervision. This raises security concerns for many women.

5.2.2 Specific housing options for Indigenous women: safe houses and cooling off houses

Consultations with workers in the domestic violence sector specifically assisting Indigenous women affected by family violence, and a review of the relevant literature for the Indigenous population, revealed safe houses and cooling off houses or spaces as their preferred option.

SAAP data (AIHW: Al-Yaman *et al* 2006) and other statistical data (Southern Domestic Violence Service and Nunga Mi:Minar 2007; ATSISJC 2006) clearly identifies the disproportionately high rates of domestic and family violence that occur within Indigenous communities. This reflects, and is a consequence of, the disadvantaged position Indigenous people generally occupy within Australian society.

As stated in a publication on *Family Violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* by the AIHW (AIHW: Al-Yaman *et al* 2006, p. 6) which reviewed and compared the impact and extent of violence in Australia and the United States, Canada and New Zealand:

> Indigenous people are over-represented in the family violence records compared with nonindigenous people as both victims and perpetrators. In addition, in each country colonisation is recognised as having a severe negative impact on indigenous people and is thought to be a major underlying cause of the high rates of violence in these communities.

Domestic and family violence has permeated some communities to the extent that it has become commonplace. Consequently, the levels of violence experienced in many communities is described by the South Australian Southern Domestic Violence Service (SDVS) and Nunga Mi:Minar (2007) as 'destructive to the spiritual, social,

economic, physical health and cultural identity of Aboriginal women'. There is considerable need within Indigenous communities for domestic violence services and means by which women and children can seek haven in a safer environment.

The review of *Good practice in Working with Aboriginal Women and Children When Experiencing Family Violence* by the SDVS and Nunga Mi:Minar (2007) notes however that Aboriginal women have a distrust of government services and support services (for a number of reasons including fear that their children may be taken away, fear of what will happen to the perpetrator in custody) and without appropriate services many Aboriginal women remain in violent situations. Solutions to family violence and the provision of housing are best provided within the communities as Aboriginal women have strong kinship ties and in the main will not leave their community.

Aboriginal women have clearly identified that they want culturally appropriate and community controlled safe houses and respite centres. One of the recommendations from the South Australian State Aboriginal Women's Gatherings 2002-2005 (SAWG 2006) was:

> Safe houses and respite centres for women and children located in areas identified by Aboriginal women as being accessible and appropriate. These should be run by community and operate within a language and cultural context (e.g. not appropriate for women from the Lands to go to Alice Springs or Port Augusta).

'Safe houses' in the Australian context refers to the Indigenous concept of a 'place where women can go before or after crisis, and stay for a time, without actually "leaving" their partner' (Weeks & Oberin 2004, p. 24). As an accepted form of crisis accommodation within Aboriginal communities safe houses are important in working with individuals to break the cycle of violence and in providing support and responsiveness to community needs. Ideally, this requires strong formal relationships with government departments and community agencies for the provision of services and ongoing support.

The Orana Far West Women's Safe Houses project funded by the NSW Department of Community Services under SAAP saw the establishment of five safe houses in far west NSW between 1992 and 2001. The establishment of these services was seen as 'an opportunity to implement a community driven approach that had the potential to support and empower women, in circumstances of enormous adversity and disadvantage, and to bring about real change in women's lives and the well being of families and communities as a whole' (NSW WRM, NSW DoCS and Orana Far West Women's Safe Houses 2006, p. 8).

Safe houses, however, offer only very short term accommodation and if longer term services are required for Aboriginal women and are not available in the region, women need to contemplate leaving town and this means not only leaving the perpetrator but also leaving their community and land. According to information collected in the consultations for this report often rural women who come to urban centres to access services don't last long. It is difficult to come to services that have access limits – restricted visiting. Most Indigenous women from regional and rural areas will return to the community from which they came as it is difficult to ask, and expect them to live in a different way – away from family and friends in an almost foreign environment. Leaving your home can make you 'homeless' for two to four years. Whether Aboriginal women stay or leave, choices of longer term housing options are often very limited by discrimination and high costs in the private rental

market and the long waiting lists for public housing accommodation (NSW WRM, NSW DoCS and Orana Far West Women's Safe Houses 2006; SDVS & Nunga Mi:Minar 2007).

As kinship ties within Aboriginal communities are strong and many women will not 'abandon their men' one successful approach to domestic violence within Aboriginal communities is to provide men's houses or what have been termed 'cooling off houses'. Research by the NSW Maari Ma Aboriginal Health Corporation indicates these have been very successful in remote NSW as women and children do not need to move from their home, it is the perpetrator of violence that moves for a short period of respite. These men's 'homes' provide a supportive environment where men can talk to each other about their issues or a place they can go voluntarily or be taken if they are affected by alcohol and are possibly aggressive. The men stay here until they become sober, can sleep and have had a meal (Memmott *et al* 2003, p.19). Such houses – along with the appropriate services – allow the issue of domestic violence within communities to be identified and tackled, whereas in communities where no such crisis service exists domestic violence remains largely hidden.

Despite the desire for safe houses and cooling off houses, studies and consultation discussions have identified a number of difficulties in establishing and maintaining these houses:

- a lack of progress in the provision of safe houses;

- a lack of funding or limited funding for such approaches sets them up for failure;

- concerns regarding the security of safe house for women and children in rural and remote areas. The SDVS & Nunga Mi:Minar (2007) quotes concerns raised by the Warndu-Wathilli-Carri Nguru Aboriginal Legal Service that safe houses in rural and remote regions were 'identifiable by community people'. They commented that 'any future planning on safe houses needs to take into account the difficulty of maintaining confidentiality around locality and the risks this imposes';

- not all safe houses have met the security requirements necessary to keep women and children safe;

- Weeks and Oberin (2004, p. 67) reported that in WA safe houses were under-funded, 'unstaffed and in poor repair';

- the distance of some communities from formal services;

- as the wish of communities is that these services be run by local staff where possible, issues around conflict of interest and safety for the employed local community members have been raised; and

- where local staff cannot fill the required positions it is difficult to recruit suitability qualified non Aboriginal staff who have a cultural understanding of Indigenous people.

In addition there is a need for research into safe houses. Weeks and Oberin's (2004) report on behalf of WESNET indicates that research is needed into 'the range of circumstances in which they operate, their preferred approaches and processes, and documentation of the resources needed to increase their effectiveness for Indigenous communities' (p. 3).

The urban Indigenous population requires different services. While they have competency in English, they are frequently service resistant. As one participant in this research stated 'they are sick of being treated in a systematic way' and they 'don't trust services particularly when children are involved', which they invariably are. Often Indigenous women stay with a service for a longer period than other women because they have more extensive issues.

The best housing option for Indigenous women in terms of long-term housing is clearly social housing. However, as with all women escaping violence the waiting list for public properties is still around two years for those in most need.

Service providers indicate that in terms of supporting Indigenous women it is important to develop services and responses that are appropriate to their culture and circumstances. That is, it is important:

- for Indigenous specific services and mainstream services to be available to provide choice;

- to try to establish meaningful services that enable women to keep ties with their community;

- that there are ways of managing the violence within the community and Indigenous women often are very knowledgeable in this area;

- Indigenous housing is fraught with a whole range of issues including the humbug issue (a Northern Territory term to describe the way Indigenous people hassle other people for money, food, accommodation and so on). Women are often the target for all other family members and this can place increasing pressure on a tenancy. Strategies need to be developed to manage this situation; and

- greater availability of social housing, as this is the best option for Indigenous people generally.

5.2.3 Supportive housing and the Housing First model

Reviews of international and Australian support models for homelessness in general indicate that the Housing First model has considerable merit and as such there has been some momentum towards this model in Australia (e.g. Common Ground Adelaide (Haggerty 2007); Calder 2006; Mitchell 2008).

Housing First is an initiative of the Beyond Shelter organisation in the US (see Box 5.3). Beyond Shelter is an overarching organisation which has been operating since 1988.[20] **It sees its role to supply housing to all those threatened with homelessness, and also has an agenda to change society to prevent homelessness existing**. Within the US it operates a wide range of support services, including not only housing but also welfare to work schemes to alleviate chronic poverty. During the twenty years of its existence the organisation has developed housing to accommodate people in a variety of ways. Programs include service enriched housing where there is specific access to support services provided. In essence it combines housing relocation services and management of problems by supplying people with housing to 'empower participants and foster self-reliance, not engender dependence …' (Beyond Shelter 2008a). There is a stress on being able to

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[20] http://www.beyondshelter.org/home.html

individualise approaches and support each family into stability and permanent housing.

Box 5.3:   The Housing First Model – Beyond Shelter, California, US

The Housing First Model

What is Housing First?

The Housing First Model is the initiative and core program of the agency, Beyond Shelter, an organisation founded in 1988 to respond to the growing numbers of homeless people in Los Angeles. The Model has been applied across America to house homeless people. In Los Angeles the program deals with 400 homeless families a year. Ninety per cent of these families are headed by lone women raising children. Of these women approximately 40 per cent became homeless because of domestic violence (Beyond Shelter 2008a).

The program operates from: '…the premise that permanent housing provides a solid base for families – enabling them to rebuild their lives, develop neighbourhood relationships, and begin to develop a sense of control over their lives. The home-visitation model utilized by Beyond Shelter helps families move into permanent housing *as quickly as possible* and then offers an individualized and structured plan of action, while providing at the same time a responsive and caring support system' (Beyond Shelter 2008a).

Eligibility

Homeless families are referred to Beyond Shelter by other agencies. To qualify for enrolment in the program a women affected by domestic violence has to have been living away from the perpetrator for at least four months.

The intake process is detailed involving a number of services and assessments – 'the screening includes identification of strengths and weaknesses of the family unit, a detailed history of health, welfare, education, employment, housing, substance abuse, family violence and "other agency contacts". ..Children are carefully screened for abuse and/or neglect … in addition, the need for child care is ascertained, and children's medical needs and those of pregnant women are detailed' (Beyond Shelter 2008a).

Once an assessment is completed the family is assigned a case manager who will provide assistance clients residence. Within three months of enrolling in the program families are housed in affordable safe rental housing. Families are able to choose housing within the private rental market that meets certain standards and a housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the Public Housing Association on behalf of the participating family.

Movement into this housing is assisted by relocation funds and assistance with dealing with debts, eviction histories and discrimination. Once housed the case manager rings daily and visits weekly for those families in crisis. This intensive management is available for up to twelve months, or for up to eighteen months if necessary.

Benefits

The Executive Director of the Interagency Council on Homelessness reported in a recent interview that a national study examining Housing First models identified a retention rate on average of 84 per cent. He stated:
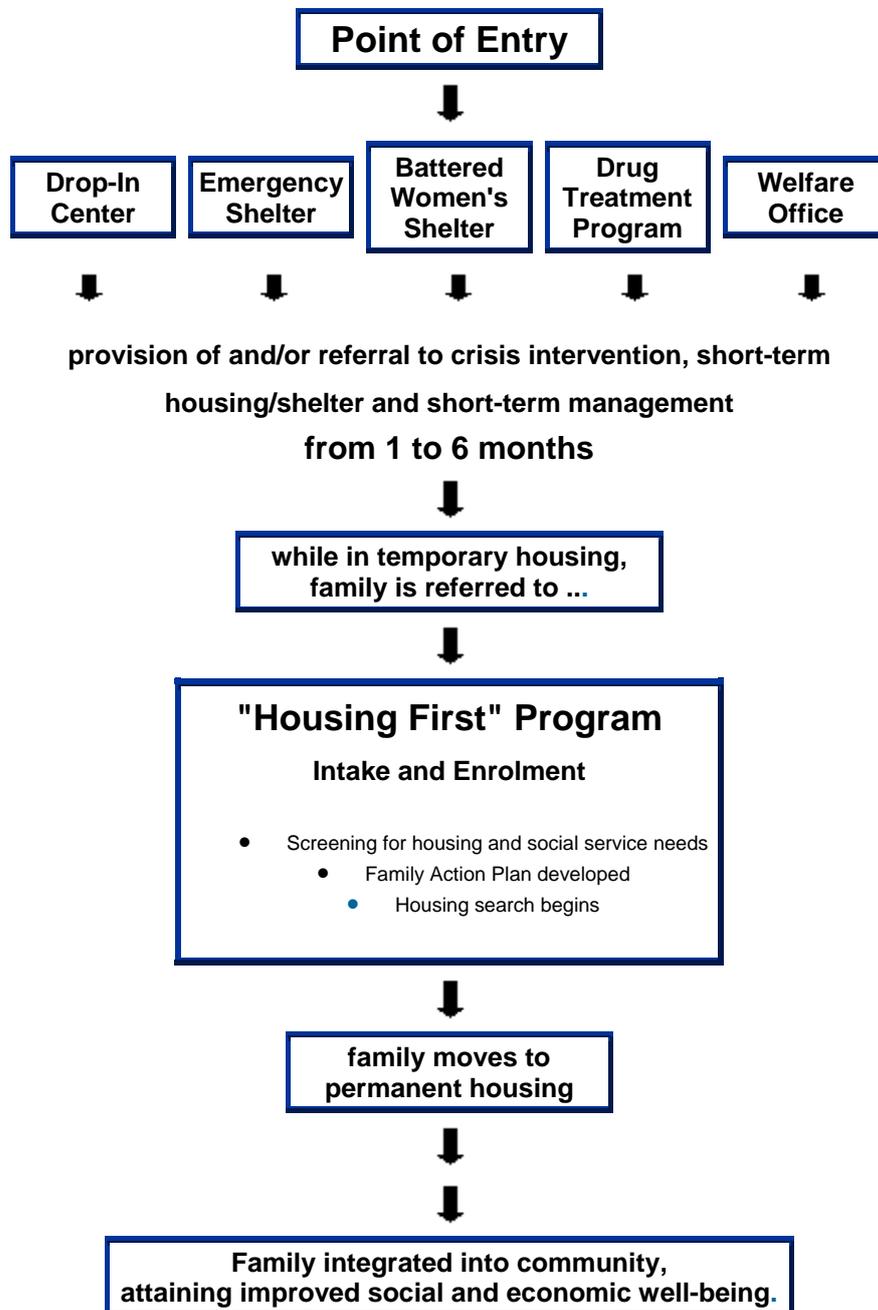
'Now remember, these are initiatives targeted to the most disabled, the most vulnerable, the most complex people. If we walked by them on the street, we would think, in the past, that a bowl of soup and a blanket is the best that we'll ever do for that person. Those are the very people that have been targeted in Housing First initiatives. That means if we can get that kind of percentage retention for the most complex and disabled, Housing First also offers an initiative, and an innovation that will work for other profiles of homeless people as well' (Mangano [Executive Director of the Interagency Council on Homelessness] in Peters 2008).

In Denver Colorado, for example, the Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative is a joint initiative which encompasses a wide range of institutions and organisations, both public and private, who aim to supply housing to Denver's homeless. Each year they produce an annual report which outlines their success at reducing homelessness over the previous year. The organisation runs Housing First which attempts to minimise the period of time people are homeless or lack shelter.

While Housing First is sometimes only seen as an approach to addressing chronic homelessness (i.e. for people who have been homeless for more than twelve months) (see Gordon 2008) in Denver it is described as moving people **straight in to permanent housing immediately and offering supportive services after they are housed** (see Figure 5.1). In this way it is perceived people can focus on the issues which caused the homelessness threat (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless 2008). While for the US it is important to acknowledge that such models are dependent on large amount of private and church funding as philanthropic support is traditional and very strong within this environment, Mitchell (2008, p. 21) senior planner at the City of Melbourne indicates that this may be a greater avenue of resourcing in Australia than it has been in the past. She states the 'idea of ending homelessness is attracting interest from philanthropic groups, businesses, and the Federal Government'.

The Housing First model appears to be an appropriate model for assisting women affected by domestic and family violence. The widespread adoption of this model in Australia, however, is likely to be hampered by the significant lack of social housing and a lack of incentives within the private rental market to provide housing for low income earners and on longer term leases. The implementation of the National Rental Affordability Scheme may be the impetus needed for more widespread support of the development of this model in Australia than is currently the case.

Figure 5.1: The Housing First program process

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   Point of Entry    │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                              ⬇
┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐
│ Drop-In  │ │Emergency │ │ Battered │ │  Drug    │ │ Welfare  │
│  Center  │ │ Shelter  │ │ Women's  │ │Treatment │ │  Office  │
│          │ │          │ │ Shelter  │ │ Program  │ │          │
└──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘
     ⬇            ⬇            ⬇            ⬇            ⬇
```

provision of and/or referral to crisis intervention, short-term

housing/shelter and short-term management

from 1 to 6 months

⬇

┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ **while in temporary housing,** │
│ **family is referred to ...**   │
└─────────────────────────────────┘

⬇

┌───┐
│ **"Housing First" Program**   │
│   │
│ **Intake and Enrolment**   │
│   │
│ • Screening for housing and social service needs │
│   • Family Action Plan developed   │
│   • Housing search begins   │
└───┘

⬇

┌─────────────────────┐
│ **family moves to** │
│ **permanent housing** │
└─────────────────────┘

⬇
⬇

┌───┐
│ **Family integrated into community,**   │
│ **attaining improved social and economic well-being.** │
└───┘

Source: Beyond Shelter 2008b

6.   Discussion and Recommendations

> Women suffering from domestic violence are not only victims of abuse, they are also victims of silence, victims of indifference and victims of neglect. They are not helpless and weak, but they are often let down.[21]

This report has investigated the issue of women, domestic and family violence and homelessness, with a specific mandate to investigate the support and particular housing models that best assist women in violence related homelessness. The research synthesised the relevant literature and involved targeted interviews with selected service providers, peak women's domestic and family violence and homelessness groups, and client representatives across Australia to understand the challenges facing the sector and any new issues being encountered.

The consultations undertaken for this research revealed the difficulties in the sector, in terms of lack of funding and capacity for crisis accommodation, for moving women into safe and affordable long-term housing, and for the provision of a continuum of care and support. Crisis services for women escaping domestic and family violence are currently in crisis themselves. Such services are under increasing strain and require additional resources to maintain services at existing levels. A review of SAAP IV in 2004 noted that 'it is apparent that the total number of homeless people in Australia has remained fairly constant for most of the past ten years' (Erebus Consulting Partners 2004a, p. 4) and that 'the overall situation at present appears to be that, whilst services to the homeless have moderate success in responding to the immediate homeless crises, the current forms of assistance to the homeless are poor at resolving longer-term issues' (Erebus Consulting Partners 2004b, p. 136). Part of the reason for this is 'perversely the very existence of the homeless assistance system encourages mainstream systems to shift the cost and responsibility for helping the most vulnerable to the homeless assistance system' (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2003, p. 4).

Meeting accommodation needs is not the only solution to addressing violence related homelessness. However, the current housing crisis in Australia – and the fact that private housing is more unaffordable than at any other time since affordability has been measured – makes housing a more important part of the picture than it has been in the past.

The sector clearly needs more resources to address the increasing numbers of women affected by domestic violence, and particularly in terms of providing permanent housing options. Much of the problem with the current system is the lack of exit points from crisis and transitional accommodation – 'no room at the inn'. These **exit points are needed across tenures, and particularly in social housing (public and community housing) and in affordable private rental housing.** The National Rental Affordability Scheme has a clear role to fulfil here. As one of the cornerstones of the Government's programs to address housing affordability, **a proportion of the proposed 50,000 properties to be developed over the term of this Scheme (we propose two per cent or 1,000 properties as a minimum in the first instance) should be assigned to women affected by domestic and family violence**. There should be a further increase in the number of properties targeted to women affected by domestic and family violence depending on need, as more properties become available and if the program is successful in terms of providing

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[21] Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe at the launch of the Council of Europe Stop Domestic Violence Against Women Campaign in Madrid November 2006 (WAVE-Network and European Info Centre Against Violence 2007).

affordable housing for low-income Australians and families and is expanded to include a second round. It would also be useful if the National Rental Affordability Scheme included a central register of available properties to assist housing workers with finding accommodation for their clients.

If the Government is serious about alleviating homelessness then **an adequate supply of social housing must be provided and maintained by Governments**. Social housing is clearly the **best housing option for women escaping domestic and family violence, providing safe, secure and guaranteed affordable housing**. **Both public and community housing options are needed**, as these options suit different groups of women, and provide additional housing options for women.

Consultations with the domestic and family violence sector revealed a cautious optimism that after some twelve years of severe under-resourcing, and despite continuing high levels of unmet demand in SAAP services, something might actually be done. This said, service providers were very concerned that the current Government does not rush into rolling out particular strategies to address violence related homelessness just 'to get runs on the board'. They were very vocal in putting forth their opinion that there is **no one accommodation and support solution** to violence related homelessness for women and children. However, **integrated approaches to addressing domestic and family violence, such as those in Tasmania, Victoria and the ACT are held up by the sector and in the literature as examples of best practice**. These approaches are considered best practice because they provide a continuum of care and support for women, however, the aforementioned lack of exit points into permanent housing and at the time most appropriate for the client is restricting the effectiveness of these approaches. The Federal Government needs to play an ongoing role in ensuring that these approaches to domestic and family violence are adequately funded. **Funding must also extend to providing outreach support and support that is both individualised and open-ended**.

Funding children as clients of these services in their own right – which does not occur now – is also needed. Children are the voiceless and often ignored victims of domestic and family violence, and exposure to such violence impacts on the social and psychological development of children. Children exposed to violence within the family home are more likely to be future victims and perpetrators of violence of all types. Assisting children from violent homes, as well as educating all children about respect for others and building healthy inter-personal relationships, are key strategies for breaking the cycle of violence in the community. **Governments must direct attention and resources to programs to educate children of all ages about domestic and family violence as a priority**. This education must of course be age appropriate.

Representatives of the domestic and family violence sector are also keen to move beyond just pilot or experimental programs and for **significant and ongoing investment to be directed to the sector and into programs that have proven rates of success**.

Consultation with the sector highlighted the fact that past recommendations in both Chung *et al* (2000) and Weeks and Oberin (2004) are still what the sector endorses and what the sector needs. These recommendations have received little or no attention from Government. **The recommendations are the preferred way forward for the sector.** The recommendations are attached to this report as Appendices B and C.

Three specific ways of assisting women with their accommodation stood out in the consultations and literature as an effective means of meeting the safety and security needs of women and children affected by domestic and family violence. These programs, however, are not universal in their applicability. This is because women (and children) affected by domestic and family violence are not a homogenous group and have many and diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Staying safely at home, for example, will only ever work for those women who choose this option and for whom it has been determined that this is a low risk and safe option. This option will never have broad applicability and will require additional resources for security measures. **The Federal Government could clearly assist here by resourcing a national fund for improving the physical security of homes for women**. Implementing safe at home initiatives in a widespread fashion will also require a recasting of past thoughts (and community education and expectations) around how women escaping domestic and family violence are assisted, **with resources for outreach support to assist women in their homes** and adequate resources to develop the partnerships necessary for the successful functioning of these programs. The **Federal Government should also assist here by funding specialist domestic violence officers within State and Territory police forces (say five in each jurisdiction) and within courts to provide information about necessary processes such as putting in place exclusion orders for the perpetrators of violence**.

Safe houses and cooling off spaces are an important and culturally appropriate measure for assisting Indigenous women fleeing family violence. The literature and consultations for this project indicate that these programs are playing an important role within the Indigenous communities that have such facilities, as they allow women to stay within their own communities, on their land and near kinship networks. The success of these programs is shaped by, and dependent on, such services being community-driven and 'owned' by communities. The success of these services is also dependent on the support and commitment to these facilities by a range of players within the communities/regions, such as police, courts and social services. These programs are also most effective and efficient when staffed by Indigenous people. As with the other housing and support initiatives discussed in this report, safe houses and cooling off spaces are severely underfunded for the essential tasks they perform within communities. **The Federal Government should provide Specific Purpose Payment funding for these services outside SAAP or attached to funding for Indigenous programs generally**. If the Federal Government is committed to improving the lives of Indigenous Australians as they have widely indicated, and as family violence and abuse are endemic problems in Indigenous communities, **safe houses and cooling off spaces are an important part of a range of programs to address family violence that must be implemented immediately, more widely and with appropriate levels of funding**.

The literature reviewed for this project also identified the Housing First model operating in some states of the US, in Canada and South Australia as another highly successful housing and support model appropriate for women and children. This model, as its name suggests, is structured around **placing people into permanent housing with some level of security of tenure first and foremost, with an extensive range of individualised support then wrapped around clients as is needed**. It has been widely successful in delivering positive outcomes for people with complex and multiple needs, and particularly for those who have a life history of homelessness, and for women escaping domestic violence. Housing First programs have widespread support in North America, from all levels of Government, community organisations, churches and philanthropists. **This model has great applicability to the Australian situation, particularly if the Federal**

Government's proposed review of the Australian Taxation system is used to also investigate how philanthropists can be more widely encouraged to support such initiatives.

A number of other important factors must also be addressed in looking at the issue of women, domestic and family violence and homelessness. The first of these is the need to review income support levels for women affected by domestic and family violence. Poverty and lack of an independent income are critical factors in the vulnerability of women to homelessness. Securing and maintaining private housing on a statutory income is almost impossible in the current environment. Related to the income support issue is the **need to extend Centrelink's Crisis Payments to be a six month support payment for women affected by domestic violence**. The current Crisis Payment structure is completely inadequate given the immediacy of needs of women affected by domestic violence. **A review of the level of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) paid to private tenants is also clearly needed**, particularly if CRA is to be maintained by Government as the major housing assistance program in Australia. There seems also to be need here to investigate other methods of improving affordability in the private rental market; a point reinforced in the YWCA's submission to the Homelessness Green Paper (YWCA 2008).

In discussing the issue of women affected by domestic and family violence and in violence related homelessness, it should be noted that sustaining women affected by domestic and family violence safely in their home or in an appropriate, affordable and safe home must be part of any solution to address violence related homelessness – as it must be for women generally (see Tually, Beer & Faulkner 2007; Tually 2008a). Some women affected by domestic and family violence **will need longer term support** to re-establish their lives, and those of their children, post-violence. This **support needs to include additional assistance with housing costs for some women, as well as therapeutic assistance, counselling, support to develop life and employment skills and assistance to purchase basic necessities such as household furniture**. Providing additional brokerage funds to the domestic and family violence sectors will ensure that women (and their children) have access to these and other types of necessary supports.

Given the declining number of social housing properties in Australia – the housing option considered the most appropriate for many women affected by domestic and family violence – investigating programs and measures assisting women with their housing longer-term must also be a policy priority. **The Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program stands out as a program to assist women with their financial and housing situation longer-term**. And, given the results of the recent evaluation of the program (MacKenzie, Desmond & Steen 2007) and the success the program has had in preventing homelessness among participants (many of whom are single mothers affected by domestic violence), this program should be expanded and rapidly rolled out across the country. The previously mentioned Family Violence Private Rental Brokerage Program being offered by Domestic Violence Outreach Services in some locations in Victoria presents another possible model for assistance – albeit likely only short-term. This program was widely praised by the domestic violence services contacted in Victoria.

Other mortgage assistance measures – such as **low-cost loans, low deposit loans and shared equity arrangements[22] also clearly have a role to play here** –

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[22] In a shared equity arrangement "a homebuyer applies for a loan to purchase a share in their home, entering into an arrangement with another party [i.e. a financial institution such as Bendigo/Adelaide

particularly for women able to stay safely at home and who need to re-finance to afford to keep their home or for women who are able to afford to purchase a home and sustain home ownership. More affordable loan products and ownership arrangements are offered by some State Governments in Australia and most notably through HomeStart Finance in SA and through Keystart in WA.[23] Shared equity products, however, are relatively new in Australia and as such we know little about their effectiveness, benefits and drawbacks. Research is needed that examines the effectiveness of these types of loans and programs, and whether they are appropriate for women who are vulnerable in the housing market, including for women affected by domestic and family violence on low/moderate incomes, women with disabilities in this situation and for single mothers.

Finally, it should be re-iterated here that there is no one solution to addressing domestic and family violence and domestic and family violence related homelessness. Provision of a continuum of individualised and open-ended supports, including a range of safe, affordable, accessible and secure accommodation options and appropriate exit points from crisis accommodation, is needed to meet the diverse needs of the many women (and the children) from many backgrounds affected by domestic and family violence, and especially for those who end up homeless because of violence.

Bank] which owns the remaining share. Shared equity loans are designed to assist people who are unable to afford the repayments on a mortgage loan for the full purchase price of a property, but whose incomes do allow them to repay a smaller loan" (Qld Department of Housing 2008).
[23]See http://www.homestart.com.au/ and http://www.keystart.com.au/key/home.htm.

Appendix A

Organisations consulted or who contacted the authors for this report:

National
Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse
Australian Women's Coalition
Elder Abuse Prevention Association
Homelessness Australia
National Rural Women's Coalition
Security4Women
WomenSpeak Network
Women with Disabilities Australia
WESNET

State based service providers
Catherine House SA
Women's Housing Association South Australia
Homelessness SA
Central Domestic Violence Service
Dawn House NT
Domestic Violence Resource Service (Mackay & Region)
DVConnect Queensland Crisis Helpline
DV Vic
Immigrant Women's Speakout Association of NSW
Nunga Mi:Minar SA
Kara House Victoria
Loddon Campaspe Family Violence Service
Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Co-operation Broken Hill NSW
Multicultural Women's Accommodation and Support Agency SA
NSW Women's Refuge Movement Resource Centre
Northern Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service
RDNS SA
Sera's Women's Shelter Townsville
Southern Domestic Violence Service, Ninko Kurtangga Patpangga SA
Statewide Women's Health SA
YWCA Australia
YWCA Adelaide
YWCA Sydney

Appendix B

Summary of recommendations from Weeks, W and Oberin, J. 2004, *Women's Refuges, Shelters, Outreach and Support Services in Australia: From Sydney Squat to complex Services, Challenging Domestic and Family Violence*, WESNET, December 2004.

Recommendation 1
That States and Territories fund domestic and family violence outreach workers who can offer daily support to women and children escaping domestic and family violence who are placed in hotels, motels and caravan parks in the absence of more suitable supportive accommodation.

Recommendation 2
That hotel, motel and caravan park use for women and children escaping violence be reduced as soon as other suitable facilities can be expanded, and as soon as possible abolished as a service delivery practice.

Recommendation 3
That all States and Territories actively seek to learn from Indigenous service models, and commit funding to locally accountable services, based on holistic Indigenous approaches, and staffed by Indigenous workers.

Recommendation 4
That incentives be built into funding programs to encourage the continued expansion of employment of bi-cultural and bi-lingual staff in services, linked to identified need in each community.

Recommendation 5
That adequate funding be allocated to specialist domestic and family violence services to provide on-going training and professional education for police, court personnel and the generalist service delivery system.

Recommendation 6
That the Australian government endorses the listed PADV recommendations from previous PADV reports along with this report and presents them to relevant government departments for action, and to the joint Commonwealth/State/Territory officers committees for funding priority and action, as the recommendations continue to remain urgent.

Recommendation 7
That the extent of unmet demand and the shortage of crisis accommodation be recognised as a serious issue, warranting expansion of funds for services.

Recommendation 8
That funding for refuges and shelters should cover their full clientele, that is, fund beds, space, resources and staff time for children 0-

18 years accompanying the presently funded 'adult/client'. This is a recommended mechanism for addressing the present under-resourcing of crisis accommodation.

Recommendation 9
That the Australian government encourage the States/Territories with high remote area needs, and other States/Territories with rural needs, to give high priority to expansion of services, outreach workers and community development and education workers to address the support and service needs in these rural and remote areas.

Recommendation 10
That the Australian government fund and assist all States and Territories to fund outreach programs and non-accommodation service models.

Recommendation 11
That the Commonwealth government fund and assist all States and Territories to provide alternative models of crisis accommodation, such as dispersed housing, cluster models and independent units.

Recommendation 12
That the Australian government fund and assist all States and Territories to expand their provision of medium term and transitional housing, in view of the acute shortage of affordable housing for women and children exiting crisis accommodation.

Recommendation 13
That the Australian government assist and encourage State and Territory Human and Community Service Departments to fund specialist workers for particular groups of women in need, in particular:
- young women experiencing violence
- women with disabilities experiencing violence
- immigrant women experiencing violence
- lesbians experiencing violence
- Indigenous workers for Indigenous women

Along with specialist workers for men's programs concerned with appropriate behaviour change and meeting appropriate standards, and children's programs for healing following domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 14:
That the Australian government open the way for additional workers to be employed within SAAP-funded services, funded by other government portfolios. For example, health workers, children's workers, Indigenous workers, Lesbian workers, bilingual workers, and community development and education workers, to assist with the development of appropriate programs to facilitate healing and recovery for women and children after domestic or family violence.

Recommendation 15:
That the Australian government fund and encourage States and Territories to provide 24 hour/7 day a week access to crisis telephone lines and appropriate crisis accommodation.

Recommendation 16:
That safety be regarded as a first principle, and incorporated into all SAAP policies and memoranda, and that of State and Territory departments funding and facilitating services to respond to domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 17:
That the Australian government strengthen the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement to ensure that all States and Territories expand the availability of affordable and safe public, social and/or community housing and loans schemes for women seeking safety after violence.

Recommendation 18:
That the Centrelink crisis payment implementation process be reviewed, to ensure it becomes widely known and accessible, and that it meets the needs of women using it, including ensuring that women do not have to leave the family home to be eligible for it.

Recommendation 19:
That the Australian government fund study tours for department personnel and service providers to visit innovative domestic and family violence services, and in addition make funds available for the production of educational videos on crisis accommodation facilities.

Recommendation 20:
That the Australian government fund WESNET (Women's Services Network) as an important peak body in the further development of services for women and children escaping violence.

Recommendation 21
That the Australian government make additional funding available for research, giving priority to research into outreach programs, safe houses and service evaluations which document innovation and draw on service-user input and experiences.

Appendix C

Summary of recommendations from Chung, D., Kennedy, R., O'Brien, B., Wendt, S., with assistance from Cody, S. 2000, *Home safe home: the link between domestic and family violence and women's homelessness*, Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, WESNET and the DFaCSIA.

Recommendation 1
 The safety of women and children continues to be an overarching principle in all service responses related to domestic and family violence including policy and protocol statements through to the involvement of women and children in their own safety planning.

Recommendation 2
The rights of women and children to remain safely in their own homes be upheld and that policies and protocols are developed that safely enable the removal of the perpetrator in situations of domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 3
Australian Governments' current commitments to community education and public awareness raising of domestic and family violence continue; approaches known to be effective are available widely and further diversity in approaches is examined to access a broad section of the Australian community.

Recommendation 4
Findings from recent PADV Evaluations of Domestic Violence Prevention Strategies and Resources for Working with Young People are used as the basis for future development and expansion of community education approaches.

Recommendation 5
Greater support is given to community development in Indigenous communities to provide community led and owned responses to addressing family violence.

Recommendation 6
Educating magistrates on the use and breaches of restraining and exclusion orders. This could be done for example through the Australian Institute of Judicial Administration and the Australian Association of Magistrates.

Recommendation 7
Consistent and comprehensive knowledge provision for women and service providers about legal rights and obligations, particularly in relation to orders and tailoring of orders created around housing circumstances. This could be done for example through police contact with the victim and the development of literature and training by various legal bodies, such as women's legal services or legal services commissions. Current good practices are extended including:

Recommendation 8
Specialist legal responses such as domestic violence courts and or magistrates who have specialist knowledge in domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 9
Legal advisory and court support for women before, during and after an order has been applied for. The following changes are made to legislation and other services.

Recommendation 10
Consistent and potent domestic violence legislation across Australia, through the introduction of model domestic violence legislation, or through legislation in each state jurisdiction which ensures the option of sole occupancy orders for women in situations of domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 11
The intersection between Family Law and State and Territory domestic violence and child protection legislation be reviewed for inconsistencies, gaps and overlaps that do not uphold the rights of women and children to safely retain their homes.

Recommendation 12
Protocols be developed between men's services and legal systems for the systematic management of men who are in both perpetrators programs and involved in State or Federal legal matters related to family or domestic violence, so that the potential effectiveness of perpetrator programs is not undermined.

Recommendation 13
Police training in the area of domestic and family violence is continued and expanded in each jurisdiction with particular reference to local conditions and contexts.

Recommendation 14
That police become aware of the importance of their role in educating women and service providers about the collection of evidence relevant to their cases.

Recommendation 15
Specialist Police Domestic Violence Units and liaison officer positions are continued and expanded.

Recommendation 16
While breaches of intervention orders may be difficult to substantiate with present evidentiary requirements, police continue to rigorously pursue breaches.

Recommendation 17
The evaluation findings of specialist police pilots which allow for increasing intensity of response to domestic violence callouts and interagency coordination be used to inform future police practice and initiatives in the areas of domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 18
To continually improve the effectiveness of police responses to domestic and family violence situations, each jurisdiction establish an independent body for monitoring police responses to domestic violence callouts.

Recommendation 19
Consideration be given to the use of new technologies which would allow breach of orders to be automatically registered with police so that the sole responsibility for reporting does not fall with women. Men's services

Recommendation 20
There is a re-orientation of men's emergency accommodation services to accommodate men removed from the home as a result of domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 21
The re-orientation of men's emergency accommodation services would require that services engage in coordinated intervention to work towards the man stopping the use of violence such as compulsory referral and attendance at perpetrator programs with accountability to women and children.

Recommendation 22
Information about men's services is available to women through domestic violence and women's services which can assist their decision making.

Recommendation 23
Perpetrator programs establish greater links with other relevant services such as alcohol, drug and gambling services to ensure where appropriate that multiple issues are addressed.

Recommendation 24
The evaluation of perpetrator programs should always include accountability to women and children in ways that are respectful and culturally appropriate to women and children.

Recommendation 25
Existing outreach services are acknowledged and funded appropriately.

Recommendation 26
Brokerage or discretionary funds are available to the States and Territories as part of the standard funding formula to respond to the specific longer term home security needs of women who have experienced domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 27
In any strategic decision about outreach services consideration be given to their use in preventing homelessness through early intervention which could involve active collaboration with other information and intervention services.

Recommendation 28
Conduct nationally coordinated research to identify models of good practice in outreach services for diverse groups of women and different local conditions and that the findings of such research be used to inform decision making for the strategic use of outreach services across jurisdictions.

Recommendation 29
Recruitment practices reflect the diversity of service users and expand the numbers of Indigenous and bi-cultural workers.

Recommendation 30
High security refuges/shelters continue to be available to ensure the safety of women and children following domestic and family violence and that they are staffed 24 hours per day, every day of the year.

Recommendation 31
Alternative models of safe emergency accommodation and support for women and children following domestic and family violence in addition to the prevailing high security option be considered to meet the heterogeneity of needs in all jurisdictions.

Recommendation 32
Rules and regulations in refuges/shelters reflect the diverse needs of women and children using the services and promote minimal disruption to important aspects of their lives.

Recommendation 33
Recruitment practices reflect the diversity of service users and expand the numbers of Indigenous and bi-cultural workers.

Recommendation 34
Coordination and protocols between refuges/shelters and other services relevant to local contexts continue to be improved.

Recommendation 35
Both communal and individual units cluster styles of accommodation be available in refuges/shelters in each area to provide for the diverse needs of women and children.

Recommendation 36
Consideration be given to strategies that combat current myths and stereotypes about refuges/shelters, for example a name change for refuges/shelters and community education initiatives.

Recommendation 37
Flexibility in the length of stay in refuges/shelters can be accommodated in response to the needs of women and children and the local housing context. Emergency, transitional and supported accommodation.

Recommendation 38
Continued support is given to the development of safe and or retreat houses on Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 39
Where motels, boarding houses and caravans continue to be required as backup in crisis these options should always position women and their children in networks of services that provide the relevant range of support.

Recommendation 40
Very short term leases are available (1-2 weeks) for women who need to briefly leave the home while arrangements for return are put in place.

Recommendation 41
Transitional and supported accommodation, linked to other domestic violence services, be available for flexible time periods in all regions to enable women and children to re-establish themselves and develop longer term plans.

Recommendation 42
WESNET engage in high level negotiations with the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments on the appropriate forms of affordable housing stock and location for women and children escaping domestic and family violence with reference to the need for safety and minimum disruption to schooling, employment and social supports.

Recommendation 43
State and Territory Governments amend priority housing evidentiary and application requirements which only acknowledge physical abuse and which require women to engage in costly, time consuming and humiliating processes to find non-public accommodation. For example obtaining a number of written refusals from more than one real estate agent in a short time period.

Recommendation 44
Consideration be given by, State and Territory governments to providing loans schemes and financial support to financially disadvantaged women to purchase their own house following relationship breakdown as a result of domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 45
WESNET seek a collaborative relationship with community housing peak bodies in Australia (the National Community Housing Forum and the Community Housing Federation of Australia) to encourage various forms of community and cooperative housing which can provide further options for women and children to gain affordable and appropriate housing.

Recommendation 46
WESNET engage in negotiations with the Real Estate Institute of Australia at the national level to redress issues of discrimination and promote fair dealings in leasing practices concerning women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 47
WESNET develop training and information packages for its members to assist domestic violence services to engage in mutually productive relationships with local real estate agents.

Recommendation 48
Legal Services Commissions and Women's Legal Services consider the possibility of taking discrimination or fair trading legal action in response to flagrant cases of unfair private rental practices.

Recommendation 49
Commonwealth, State and Territory governments engage in high level negotiations with financial institutions and other lending authorities to implement policies around loan restructuring for women who become sole occupants of the residence following relationship breakdown as a result of domestic and family violence. Services for Children.

Recommendation 50
Children in domestic violence services are consistently treated as clients in their own right and that this is reflected in specific funding arrangements.

Recommendation 51
In planning decisions around redeveloping refuges/shelters consideration be given to the needs of young children and adolescents accompanying women.

Recommendation 52
Access to child support workers be available for all women and children using domestic violence accommodation and non-accommodation services.

Recommendation 53
Opportunities are sought and further developed for inter-agency case management with children in domestic violence services who have special needs.

Recommendation 54
The provision of services for women to understand and prepare for children's behaviour following domestic and family violence experiences be available in all areas of Australia.

Recommendation 55
All human service organisations have domestic violence policies and that these policies do not force women to construct themselves as victims fleeing the situation in order to gain access to benefits and services.

Recommendation 56
Consideration be given to the expansion and greater use of coordinated inter-agency domestic violence models that include core and peripheral agencies in all areas of Australia suitable to local conditions.

Recommendation 57
Coordinated models be supported with protocols amongst domestic violence services and between domestic violence and non domestic violence services.

Recommendation 58
Single entry point into domestic and family violence services be available in all areas of Australia and that consideration be given to improving their user responsiveness.

Recommendation 59
Findings of the evaluations of existing domestic violence response teams are used in the strategic development of further services across Australia.

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