



**Community Housing**  
INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

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# Submission

## National Plan to End Violence Against Women and their Children



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## Introduction

CHIA is the peak body representing not for profit community housing organisations (CHOs) across Australia. Our 150+ members manage a \$40 billion-plus portfolio of more than 100,000 homes, housing people on low and moderate incomes who find it hard to access affordable and appropriate tenancies in the private market.

This submission is also supported by the following organisations :

- CHIA Victoria
- CHIA NSW
- CHIA ACT
- CHIA QLD
- ACTShelter
- QShelter
- ShelterWA
- ShelterTAS

Many of our members provide accommodation specifically targeted at women (and their children) who have experienced housing insecurity due to domestic violence, and are amongst the organisations awarded contracts under the Commonwealth government's Safe Places Program. We understand that safe, secure and affordable housing needs to be available to assist women escaping violence.

Our members also understand the role that responsive tenancy management can play in responding to DFV. CHOs are often on the front line dealing with the fall out of domestic and family violence (DFV) and have an opportunity to make a significant difference through the implementation of well-designed and evidenced policies and procedures. They need to implement approaches to identifying and responding to DFV that assist victims/survivors to either remain safely in their own home or relocate to a safe environment. CHOs also need to engage with perpetrators in a safe and responsible way.

CHIA is making this written submission to express our concern that housing - its provision and management - is not receiving the attention it merits. The silence on housing in the consultation guide is disappointing. Similarly, its omission from the agenda of the Women's Summit and the apparent absence of housing as an explicit focus of any of the Monash University workshops is a concern.

While we have completed the on-line survey, its format constrains responses. In this short letter we have therefore briefly highlighted the issues we hope the National Plan will consider, alongside those important issues already identified in the consultation material.

## Housing and Domestic and Family Violence

Women who have experienced domestic and family violence are the largest group seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services. This is part of a longer-term trend with a 26% increase in households experiencing DFV seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services over a four year period from 2014 <sup>1</sup>

DFV is the single most common reason women and children become homeless in Australia, with those who have experienced family and domestic violence make up 41% of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients in 2019–20.<sup>2</sup> More than half of these women (55.8%) required accommodation. Of these, almost one in four (24.3%) were not provided with services directly.

SHS provide the principal crisis response for women and children who have to leave their home due to violence, yet data suggests that for many there is little services can do to provide a pathway into stable, secure, long-term housing (Flanagan et al. 2019).<sup>3</sup>

Flanagan et al. (2019) also identified that people fleeing violence often require safe, affordable, independent housing in which to live in the long term and yet, some are unable to secure it. In the absence of an appropriate housing solution, some women may consider returning to a violent relationship. While the availability of long-term housing is a key challenge for SHS clients overall, it is particularly so for this large client group.

A lack of affordable housing options may also mean that individuals are unable to escape violent and abusive living/family situations. Canadian research found that one in three women returned to an abusive relationship because of missing affordable housing options (Ponic cited in Thomas 2017<sup>4</sup>).

The drivers of family and domestic violence are highly complex and there is little evidence in the literature on direct impact of housing costs on increases or decreases in the incidence of abuse. However, a lack of social and affordable housing is shown to exacerbate the public sector cost of dealing with family and domestic violence. Escapees from abusive relationship often end up in crisis accommodation in the first instance, but the absence of follow-on housing options results in individuals (primarily women) returning to abusive relationships and becoming repeat users of services, with some 60% of people seeking refugee or emergency accommodation turned away. One Australian submission to the parliamentary Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia estimates the annual? avoid costs to government as **\$23,450** per person <sup>5</sup>

Existing data on tenancies allocated in social and affordable housing does not provide a comprehensive picture of the characteristics of those being housed. However, people requiring accommodation because their life or safety is at risk in their current accommodation are one of largest cohorts being allocated social housing.<sup>6</sup> This implies that women escaping violence are being prioritised under the current social housing

<sup>1</sup> [Australian-Homelessness-Monitor-2020.pdf \(launchhousing.org.au\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Specialist homelessness services annual report, Clients who have experienced family and domestic violence - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Flanagan, K., Blunden, H., Valentine, K and Henriette, J. 2019. Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence, AHURI Final Report 311, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, M. (2017) *On the benefits of affordable housing: an assessment of recent literature for municipalities*, Table de Quartier Sud de l'Ouest-de-L-ile: Quebec.

<sup>5</sup> Finance and Public Administration Reference Committee 2015.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia/contents/priority-groups-and-waiting-lists>

allocations systems. Where housing assistance is not provided, it therefore suggests this is because there is too little accommodation becoming available.

Perhaps the most meaningful measure of this lack of social and affordable housing in Australia, is the long-term reduction in the annual number of such properties being let to new tenants. Taking into account both public housing and community housing nationally, the gross number of social rental lettings dropped from 52,000 in 1997 to 35,000 in 2017 – an absolute decline of a third<sup>7</sup>. Pro rata to population, this represents an effective reduction in social housing supply of some 50%. This has resulted from the virtual cessation of new construction, as well as from the diminished number of existing social rental homes becoming available for re-letting each year – this, in turn, reflecting the declining proportion of existing tenants with the capacity to transition into the private market.

Recently In the '[Nowhere To Go' Equity Economics report](#) the authors found that the 'lack of long term social housing is leading to 7,690 women a year returning to violent partners and 9,120 women a year becoming homeless'.<sup>8</sup> It is also likely that the anticipation of homelessness will deter women leaving a violent partner. Often unrecognised is the impact that the absence of alternative housing options may have on perpetrators' decisions whether or not to leave.

We recognise the Commonwealth government has invested in additional crisis and transitional housing responses. While necessary these are an insufficient response. Also required are sustainable move-on options that match household incomes and circumstances.

## Tenancy Managers and their role in responding to DFV

The role of skilled and responsive tenancy managers is important and sometimes critical in determining whether a person experiencing DFV is identified, linked to specialist support, and assisted to remain safely at home or found alternative accommodation. In addition, responses to a perpetrator can influence whether there is a successful outcome for the person experiencing DFV.

With funding from some state governments, industry development projects such as those in [NSW](#) and [Victoria](#) to build CHO capacity in responding to domestic and family violence have been developed, and CHIA is currently in the early stages of the development of a toolkit and standard to further strengthen the housing response to victim / survivors of DFV across all of Australia.

The project will:

- Develop a National Community Housing Standard (NCHS) to support quality review of the CHO service response to tenants and applicants who are victim /survivors of DFV as well as DFV perpetrators living, or seeking to live, in community housing
- Develop a national toolkit that builds on the three initiatives already developed in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria to support CHOs across Australia to deliver a quality service response

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<sup>7</sup> Pawson, H., Milligan, V. & Yates, J. (2020) Housing Policy in Australia: A case for system reform; Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>8</sup> [Everybody's Home \(everybodyshome.com.au\)](http://everybodyshome.com.au)

- Develop training materials that can be utilised across states and territories to support CHOs strengthen their understanding and practice in providing housing to victims / survivors of DFV as well as DFV perpetrators

CHIA hopes that the National Plan will recognise the role that adequate affordable housing provision and high quality tenancy management can play.

**Contact:**

Wendy Hayhurst

CEO, CHIA

Email: [wendy.hayhurst@communityhousing.com.au](mailto:wendy.hayhurst@communityhousing.com.au)

Mobile: 0421 046 832