

Creating a framework for ending homelessness



## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Saying NO to Violence: a leading cause of homelessness

Australia's national homelessness peak body has joined forces with the Women's Services Network (WESNET) and the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) to highlight and endorse the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Escaping domestic and family violence is the most often cited reason given by women for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services. It is a *leading cause of homelessness in Australia*.

"The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children highlights that gender inequality remains the main cause of and consequence of violence against women. Unless we, as a nation, deal with this, violence will continue to cause women and their children to seek support from specialist services and they will continue to be physically and emotionally harmed. Violence against women and their children is a violation of their human rights," Julie Oberin, Chairperson of WESNET and the AWAVA said today.

Women are too often forced to flee situations of escalating domestic and family violence with their children with many seeking refuge with providers of specialist homelessness services.

"Last year specialist homelessness services provided support to over 84,000 women. 48% of women who presented to services with children seeking help nominated escaping domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking assistance," Homelessness Australia's CEO Nicole Lawder said.

The high number of children, particularly very young children supported by specialist homelessness services each year highlights the devastating causes of and the impact domestic and family violence has on families in Australia.

"Domestic and family violence is distressing for families and children. Last year 1 in 38 Australian children spent time in a homelessness service. This is a damning statistic and a shocking indictment on our nation. Eliminating violence against women would dramatically reduce homelessness in Australia," Homelessness Australia's Chairperson Narelle Clay said.

Homelessness Australia, WESNET and AWAVA urge all Australian governments and the community to do more to promote awareness about the impact that domestic and family

We are here:

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violence has on individuals and society and to do more to promote the need for all men to take greater responsibility for working to eliminate violence against women and children in Australia.

<http://www.facs.gov.au/sa/women/progserv/violence/nationalplan/Pages/default.aspx>

[Homelessness Australia Fact Sheet on Homelessness and Women](#)

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## Our organisations

**Homelessness Australia** is the national peak body representing more than 1500 providers of direct services for people experiencing homelessness and working to achieve our aim of creating a framework to end homelessness. For more information, please visit <http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/site/index.php>

**The Women's Services Network (WESNET)** is a Founding Council of Homelessness Australia, the national peak body for homelessness. WESNET is the national peak body working on behalf of women and their children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic or family violence. With almost 400 members across Australia, WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women's refuges, women's shelters, safe houses, women's housing services, women's counselling, support and advocacy services and information and referral services. For more information, please visit <http://wesnet.org.au/>

**The Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA)** is one of six National Women's Alliances funded by the Australian Government. AWAVA's key area of focus is combating all forms violence against women, to 'ensure that all women and children are able to live free from all forms of violence and abuse'. The Alliance recognises that gender violence is both a consequence and cause of gender inequity in all sectors of society and so it must be addressed by promoting women's empowerment. Please visit <http://awava.org.au/>

## The numbers

- On any given night approximately 105,000 Australians have no safe and secure place to call home.
- 56% of those were male, 44% female.
- Of those, 44,000 (43%) are under 25 and 12,000 are children aged 0-12.
- Evidence indicates that homelessness is increasing among children and families and older Australians.
- Just under 205,000 people received support from specialist homelessness services in 2008/09. Of those, just over 79,000 were children.
- 1 in 38 Australian children aged 0-4 spent time in a homelessness service in 2008/09.
- As at January 2010, 233,171 Australians were on social housing waiting lists.
- The National Housing Supply Council estimates that the shortage of affordable housing dwellings in Australia has reached 493,000.

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## The causes

- Escaping domestic and family violence is the most often cited reason given by women for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services in 2008/09.
- Family breakdown was the most often cited reason given by young people.
- Financial crisis and being unable to meet housing costs were the most often cited reasons given by men.
- People leaving institutions such as child protection, foster care, mental health settings and prisons are at a much higher risk of becoming homeless than other Australians.
- The shortage of affordable housing is a cause of homelessness as well as being a major factor preventing people from being re-housed quickly.

## The solutions

1. We need an immediate increase in crisis specialist refuge and outreach accommodation and support to address the current turn away due to services being full. This is especially so during the period of increased demand on services due to increased reporting which is a direct result of increased community awareness of the issues and available responses.
2. We need a commitment to sustained on-going investment in new social housing dwellings between now and 2020. This will of course need to be accompanied by support packages for women who require assistance to re-establish housing and sustain a tenancy.
3. We need to increase the supply of affordable homes. Homelessness Australia is calling on all political parties to commit to supporting the implementation of policies, programs and strategies that will facilitate the construction of an additional 220,000 affordable homes, including social housing dwellings by 2020.
4. Women and their children must be supported to stay in the family home when domestic violence is confirmed and the perpetrator is evicted when it is safe to do so. This will require appropriate risk assessment and management, an integrated response from courts, law enforcement, housing and support services with a focus on survivor safety and perpetrator accountability.
5. Women in regional, rural and remote areas escaping domestic violence require an increased range of safe housing options and services.
6. Services for women who are not escaping violence need to be expanded and adequately resourced. There is evidence that the number of older women needing assistance for whom domestic violence is not the cause of their homelessness is growing. This group must be appropriately supported.

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