



Feedback on the draft Northern Territory Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Workforce and Sector Development Plan 2020-2028

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Statement of Recognition

The Salvation Army acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters throughout Australia. We pay our respect to Elders, past, present and emerging, acknowledging their continuing relationship to this land and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

Introduction and recommendations

We would like to thank the Northern Territory government for providing The Salvation Army with an opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Northern Territory Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Workforce and Sector Development Plan (the Plan) 2020-2028.

Building a capable and responsive Northern Territory domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) workforce is paramount to address the high rates of violence in the Northern Territory and the health, wellbeing and safety of the workforce in the sector.

Our input is structured around the guidance questions on workforce and organisational capability and sector development as provided in the draft Plan.

Recommendations

- In the absence of a nationally consistent approach, introduction of DFSV workforce standards will ensure quality of service provision for victim-survivors accessing family violence services in the Northern Territory. However due to the composition and transient nature of the current workforce, services will need additional resources and time to transition to a Code of Practice and corresponding Workforce Development Strategy and Plan (the Plan).
- Fundamental accredited family and sexual violence training must address the sensitivities related to culturally-and linguistically-diverse communities; victim-survivors with disability; and the intersections between DFSV and human trafficking and domestic servitude, forced marriage and temporary migration.
- Additional funding and support should be provided to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver cultural supervision and training to strengthen cultural competency, resources and models within DFSV services.
- Training needs in the Plan should be expanded to include information sharing across services, trauma informed parent-child relationship responses and management (not just identification) of the perpetrator's behaviour.
- Establishment of DFSV sector service standards and governance arrangements that integrate family violence services with other key sectors and services, will inform continual improvement, systemic reform and social change.

1.1 DFSV workforce capability

1. What are the key issues in regards to DFSV workforce capability?
2. What are the strengths in regards to DFSV workforce capability?
3. What other activities are already occurring in this area?
4. What difference would having accredited DFSV training make to workers and clients?
5. What are the options for improved coordination and delivery of training?
6. What are the key issues in regards to practice standards for specialist DFSV workers?
7. What are the future needs of the DFSV specialist workforce?

Need for minimum qualification standards

The key issue for DFSV workforce capability in the Northern Territory is a lack of minimum qualification standards. While we recognise that it would be ideal to have a nationally consistent approach, the introduction of qualification standards will ensure quality of service provision for victim-survivors accessing family violence services in the Northern Territory.

Any standards should articulate the capabilities required to ensure effective responses to those subject to or perpetrating family violence and should apply to all those employed in the broad range of family violence roles and positions. Knowledge of legislative, policy and practice frameworks is paramount. The Australian Association of Social Workers' Family Violence Capability Framework recognises the need for effective culturally appropriate engagement, assessment and management of risk including perpetrator accountability and prioritising safety through effective multidisciplinary case management plans.¹

Establishing qualification standards for the DFSV workforce will enable services to implement a uniform approach to staff recruitment and retention including remuneration. It will also facilitate capability benchmarking for those currently working within services or those interested in entering the family violence workforce.

The implementation of qualification standards across the Northern Territory will need to be cognisant that services will need additional resources and time to transition. A remote workforce will require access to streamlined cost-effective online courses, study leave provisions and backfill opportunities for those undertaking further study as required. Services with mature-age, long-term staff with limited to no qualifications, will need time to complete additional study requirements. The transient nature of employment across the Northern Territory will mean that recruiting staff with higher qualifications (or the ability to commit to further training) is likely to

¹ Australian Association of Social Workers, Family Violence Capability Framework, 2018.
<https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/10951>.

prove difficult. Family violence services are already finding it challenging to recruit well-trained staff.

The Northern Territory may benefit in creating a jobs hub dedicated to the family violence workforce as implemented in Victoria.² The hub is a free platform to advertise and recruit for family violence roles and search through résumés of potential workers to fill positions.

Coordination and delivery of good-practice training via a Workforce Development Strategy and Plan

As there are no minimum qualification standards, there has been limited investment in training of staff within the system nor access to fundamental and ongoing trauma-informed, person-centered and culturally appropriate family safety training. At the same time, violence impacts people across a diversity of gender identities, social and cultural contexts, and within various intimate, family and family-like relationships.

It is important that the fundamentals of family and sexual violence training address sensitivities relevant to culturally- and linguistically-diverse communities; victim-survivors with disability; and the intersections between DFSV and human trafficking and domestic servitude³, forced marriage⁴ and temporary migration.⁵ Accredited training will ensure a consistent understanding of DFSV dynamics across the workforce and will establish a set of core workforce skills.

Due to the high prevalence of Aboriginal women and children in DFSV services, cultural competence is critical as is training delivered with local Indigenous knowledge and expertise. Additional funding and support to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver cultural supervision and training will strengthen cultural competency, resources and models within DFSV services. Services with Indigenous employees could initiate yarning circles to promote cultural competency and practical solutions to organisation-wide cultural practices. The Salvation Army has recently implemented this approach with great interest and participation across the organisation.

Prioritised within the workforce development plan (the Plan) must be information sharing across services, trauma informed parent-child relationship responses and management of the perpetrators' behaviour. The Plan must also extend to retention of skills; ongoing professional

² Victorian Government, Family Violence Jobs Portal. <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-jobs>.

³ Heather Moore, Service or Servitude: A Study of Trafficking for Domestic Work in Australia, 2019. <https://www.mercyfoundation.com.au/service-or-servitude/>.

⁴ Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, Issues Paper: Opportunities to respond to forced marriage within Australia's domestic and family violence framework, 2019. https://goodshep.org.au/media/2423/g sanz-issues-paper_opportunities-to-respond-to-forced-marriage-within-australias-domestic-and-family-violence-framework.pdf

⁵ Marie Segrave, Temporary Migration and Family Violence: An analysis of victimisation, vulnerability and support. https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1532307/temporary-migration-and-family-violence-an-analysis-of-victimisation-vulnerability-and-support.pdf

development; debriefing, prevention and management of vicarious trauma and long term career pathways.

Future needs of the DFSV specialist workforce

Services require the infrastructure to support a transition from the previous 'refuge' (and often congregate care) approach to a specialist family violence service system. While remaining committed to best practice, many services are understaffed and underfunded.

There are different issues and complexities for a DFSV workforce working remotely, particularly delivering outreach case management services. Delivery of outreach services is usually haphazard and undertaken when there is capacity to do so. Unreliable internet connections also inhibit the safety of remote workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic elevated the urgent need for: additional frontline staff, use of business continuity plans to manage unexpected events, improved governance to share knowledge and resources and improved access to IT resources such as computers, laptops and phones.

A future highly skilled workforce will need to manage coordinated responses particularly for high risk cases. Integrated responses should reflect the Victorian Risk Assessment and Management Panel Model that includes information sharing across police, child protection, DFSV services and cross sector services including health to monitor, manage and implement perpetrator accountability.

1.2 DFSV specialist service organisational capacity

1. What are some of the strengths around organisational capacity in specialist DFSV services, including in remote areas?
2. What are some of the challenges around organisational capacity in specialist DFSV services, particularly in remote areas?
3. What is needed for organisations to support worker health, wellbeing and safety?
4. What are the issues regarding service standards for DFV specialist services?

Organisational capacity in remote areas

Challenges

Family violence services and the DFSV workforce in the Northern Territory are stretched.

As infrastructure within organisations generally sits within major cities, remote supervision of the workforce is heavily dependent on telecommunications for access to finance, administration processes and clinical and cultural supervision. Risks to the workforce increase when internet access is limited or non-existent. Further risks exist for a workforce who live and work in their

community. In these circumstances, staff may know both the victim and perpetrator which can have long term implications for workforce wellbeing and safety.

With an increased need for specialist clinical support, there is uncertainty around an appropriate client/staff caseload ratio, particularly in remote areas of the Northern Territory. In many situations victim-survivors and their children require long term assistance beyond six months. As organisations are not funded to case manage children, caseloads for staff in remote areas increase significantly when assisting families with many dependent children.

Strengths

While there are many challenges in remote service delivery, organisations in remote communities are well known for their strong capacity to collaborate, develop cross-stream partnerships and community generosity to effect better outcomes for vulnerable women and their children. Services also benefit from long-term Indigenous staff who deliver case management in a culturally appropriate way.

Service standards for DFV specialist services

The governance processes and leadership role of specialist family violence services must be accountable to victim-survivors.

Establishment of sector service standards such as the Code of Practice developed by Domestic Violence Victoria⁶, business continuity plans linked with funding needs, evidence-based responses, outcome measurement and building of referral pathways and coordinated responses will go a long way to achieving respect and belief in the sector. A code of practice has foundational guidance and organisational-level standards. They include a set of principles and standards to guide quality service provision, informed by evidence and theoretical frameworks and clarify relationships and governance within the broader family violence response system.

Accountability to victim-survivors will also improve through accreditation of DFSV services against a Code of Practice. This approach is currently being rolled out across Victoria using the Quality Innovation Performance (QIP) model⁷.

⁶ Domestic Violence Victoria. Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim-Survivors, http://dvvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/INTERIM-FINAL_2020_-_Code-of-Practice_DVvic.pdf

⁷ Quality Innovation Performance, Limited. <https://www.qip.com.au/>

Governance arrangements that include family violence services with other key sectors and services⁸, will also inform continual improvement, systemic reform and social change. While the role of regional coordinators are valued, we acknowledge that their role should be expanded to areas such as Alice Springs and Darwin to facilitate collaboration with the Northern Territory government.

Worker health, wellbeing and safety

It is critical that funding agreements acknowledge an organisation's role in managing occupational health and safety needs and the wellbeing of their workers. Leadership training is required to provide clinical supervision to deal with vicarious trauma and stress. Mentoring support is also important to help retain staff and provide long term career options and pathways in the sector. An organisation's location, physical environment and resources all impact on the work, health and safety needs of the DFSV workforce.

1.3 DFSV sector development

1. What other ways are there to promote collaboration across the specialist sector?
2. How can advocacy be strengthened across the Territory?
3. What does integrated service delivery mean for you?
4. How would a Northern Territory DFSV peak body add value to sector development?

Collaboration and integrated service delivery

To meet increasing demand for DFSV services in the Northern Territory, it is critical that the sector is seen as an attractive employment choice. There are opportunities to further collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to build cultural responses to training and explore the establishment of internship pathways through education programs and other community programs to promote an uptake of employment within the sector.

Establishing service sector standards and a governance structure to support its implementation will help facilitate an integrated service delivery approach. Integrated service delivery allows for a holistic approach to case management and ensures communication is open between all agencies and services. Integration streamlines and speeds up processes and referrals for caseworkers on behalf of victim-survivors and their children.

The sector standards must acknowledge the need for coordinated responses and clear referral pathways and support. This includes DFSV services working with family violence, child and

⁸ Family Violence Regional Integration: Driving greater integration of regional family violence responses. https://www.thelookout.org.au/sites/default/files/Family%20Violence%20Regional%20Integration%20Factsheet%20Dec%202017_2.pdf

mental health specialists, police, general practitioners, hospitals, maternity care, education, courts and perpetrators.

Coordinated responses also benefit in investing in early intervention approaches that work with vulnerable families. One example is the Alexis Program—a Family Violence Response Model in Victoria that embeds Family Violence Specialists with Police reducing recidivism by up to 85%.⁹ Future investment and research¹⁰ into integrated family violence, child and family and perpetrator services will also improve support for parent-child relationships and children exposed to family violence.

Establishment of a Peak body

Peak bodies add value in that they provide an opportunity to collectively advocate on behalf of the sector without the added pressure of competing for services or funding. Peak bodies are also afforded the policy time and space to discuss sector issues and work with government and non-government organisations on initiatives to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence.

⁹ Harris, L., Powell, A. and Hamilton, G. Alexis – Family Violence Response Model, School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, 2017, RMIT University, Melbourne.

¹⁰ Independent assurances report to Parliament 2019-2020. Managing support and safety hubs, Victorian Auditor General's Office. https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/20200527-Support-Safety-Hubs-report_0.pdf.