



CENTRE FOR  
Women's Safety  
and Wellbeing

# HOUSING WOMEN AND CHILDREN ESCAPING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

## BRIEFING PAPER

OCTOBER 2022



## Acknowledgement of Country

The Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing acknowledges the Whadjuk Nyoongar people as the Traditional Owners of the land where our office is located. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation, and we pay respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

## Recognition of Victims and Survivors

The Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing recognises the strength and resilience of adults, children, and young people who have experienced domestic, family, and sexual violence and acknowledge that it is essential that responses to domestic, family, and sexual violence are informed by their expert knowledge and advocacy.

We pay respect to those who did not survive and acknowledge friends and family members who have lost loved ones to the preventable and far-reaching issue of domestic, family, and sexual violence.



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## Introduction

For women and their children escaping domestic and family violence, access to housing that is secure, affordable, and immediately available is the most critical factor in their support pathway.

In Western Australia, women are usually economically worse off than men: they are more likely to take time out of the workforce to take on caring roles; to work part-time; and are paid less than their male counterparts for the same work. When a woman decides to leave a violent partner, her options are usually limited as an abusive partner may control finances and her capacity to work may have been diminished by the abuse. If she is leaving with children, she needs to find a safe place for them to stay too. When women do leave, they may find themselves accessing a women's refuge. From there, social housing is one option, but it is currently in extremely short supply in Western Australia. Another option is the private rental market. However, women leaving refuges are finding it nearly impossible to access suitable rental accommodation.

The effect of living with a perpetrator of domestic and family violence can be devastating for both women and children. Women may be killed, sexually assaulted, or seriously physically injured. Their physical, mental and sexual and reproductive health may deteriorate, and their energy depleted. The emotional and cognitive development of children experiencing domestic and family violence can be significantly impacted, with long-term consequences on their life outcomes, opportunities, and expectations. Women and children who experience domestic and family violence frequently lose a sense of having a 'home', even before the relationship comes to an end and the family continues to share their accommodation. This is because women's and children's sense of safety and belonging is destroyed if they feel unsafe and are unable to live their day-to-day life without fear of violence.

Despite policy reforms that prioritise victim-survivors remaining in their homes, many women are still forced to leave. Feedback from victim-survivors using 'Safe at Home' program evaluations indicated that when they left their homes, it was often because they could not afford rent or mortgage repayments on a single income<sup>1</sup>. With the chronic shortage of affordable housing in the private rental market, a lack of public housing, and inappropriate crisis accommodation, women fleeing an abusive partner often find they are living in unsafe and temporary housing situations.

Over 90 per cent of first requests by domestic and family violence clients to Specialist Homelessness Services for long-term accommodation were unable to be met<sup>2</sup>. According to the most recent ABS Personal Safety Survey, around one in five women returned to

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<sup>1</sup> Breckenridge, J., Chung, D., Spinney, A., & Zufferey, C. (2016). National mapping and meta-evaluation outlining key features of effective "safe at home" programs that enhance safety and prevent homelessness for women and their children who have experienced domestic and family violence: Final report. Sydney: ANROWS.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018–19, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 30 August 2022.



violent partners because they had no financial support or nowhere else to go<sup>3</sup>.

Breckenridge et al. found that women were more likely to return to their partner if they had difficulty maintaining independent accommodation<sup>4</sup>.

Victim-survivors who manage to get into a refuge often remain in a refuge far longer than is necessary or is desired due to the lack of available housing or because they cannot afford housing anywhere else and domestic and family violence services refuse to exit them into homelessness. While a Safe at Home response or access to private rental is an option for some, the reality is that the high cost of housing in the private market compared to income support payments and the single incomes of many victim-survivors makes housing in the private market financially unsustainable for many.

The risk of becoming homeless, and the reality for many of being homeless, is one of the most common reasons victim-survivors return to a perpetrator of domestic and family violence. Victim-survivors cannot be properly supported, and the cycle of violence broken, without access to safe, affordable and sustainable housing. Research indicates that secure and stable housing is critical to promote safety and wellbeing, including for children<sup>5</sup>.

The problems are compounded for women in regional and remote areas. Interviewees from an ANROWS study in the Kimberley region noted that there were very few safe and affordable housing options for women in the area. Women often lived in highly disadvantaged circumstances and were not able to save money. This, plus a lack of private transport, could make securing alternative long-term accommodation very difficult<sup>6</sup>. Overcrowded and poorly maintained housing were highlighted as exacerbating violence and making women and children more vulnerable to abuse from a broad range of potential abusers<sup>7</sup>. Inadequate housing is also a factor that can perpetuate abuse. If women need stable housing, particularly if they need housing to maintain custody, they are more likely to return to an abuser<sup>8</sup>.

## Systemic barriers across the housing market

In recent years, domestic and family violence has had a high profile as an issue warranting governmental and societal attention and intervention. Governments have adopted

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). Personal safety, Australia, 2016 (Cat.no. 49.06.0). Canberra, ACT: ABS.


<sup>4</sup> Breckenridge, J., Chung, D., Spinney, A., & Zufferey, C. (2016). National mapping and meta-evaluation outlining key features of effective "safe at home" programs that enhance safety and prevent homelessness for women and their children who have experienced domestic and family violence: Final report. Sydney: ANROWS.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Breckenridge, Jen Hamer, BJ Newton and Kylie Valentine 2013 Final Evaluation Report for Long-Term Accommodation and Support for Women and Children Experiencing Domestic and Family Violence. Centre for Gender-Related Violence Studies (CGRVS) and Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC).

<sup>6</sup> Wendt, S., Chung, D., Elder, A., Hendrick, A., & Hartwig, A. (2017). Seeking help for domestic and family violence: Exploring regional, rural, and remote women's coping experiences: Research report (ANROWS Horizons, 06/2017). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

<sup>7</sup> Blagg, H., Williams, E., Cummings, E., Hovane, V., Torres, M., & Woodley, K.N. (2018). Innovative models in addressing violence against Indigenous women: Final report (ANROWS Horizons, 01/2018). Sydney: ANROWS.

<sup>8</sup> Blagg, H., Williams, E., Cummings, E., Hovane, V., Torres, M., & Woodley, K.N. (2018). Innovative models in addressing violence against Indigenous women: Final report (ANROWS Horizons, 01/2018). Sydney: ANROWS.



strategies, policies and programs designed to hold perpetrators accountable and support and protect victim-survivors. These have been accompanied by investment and reform to promote the provision of more integrated services for families affected by violence. However, attention to the housing needs of women and children escaping perpetrators of domestic and family violence is much less prominent. There are limited interventions designed to address systemic barriers across the housing market. The way our system is set up is as a system of shelters for people, mainly for women, fleeing a perpetrator of violence, and many of them with their children.

*It's so difficult [for] the workers to be able to support [victim-survivors] in that space when they have no stability and no safe space to sleep, or they don't know where they are going to be next week. The housing piece and the homelessness piece is so massive, it underpins so much.*

Our capacity to offer suitable, affordable and safe housing options for women experiencing domestic and family violence was further deteriorating prior to the pandemic and the current housing crisis. Before the pandemic, on one income, it was unaffordable for an adult to re-establish a home in a private rental market, which is really their only option for housing. Some, of course, attained social housing, but not anywhere near the numbers that needed it. AIHW data on unmet need suggests that a high proportion of requests for assistance with accommodation, particularly long-term accommodation, are unable to be met<sup>9</sup>. AIHW data also indicated that for many recipients of SHS assistance, there is little change in their housing situation over the time in which they receive support<sup>10</sup>.

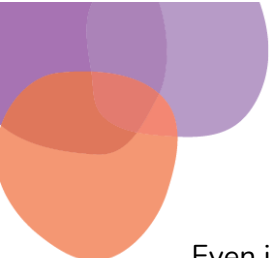
Existing domestic and family violence support programs cannot compensate for the absence of affordable, suitable housing—so moving from short-term or transitional forms of accommodation into permanent, stable, independent housing is extremely difficult, and sometimes unachievable, for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

Women leaving abusive partners theoretically have three tenures available to them: home ownership, social housing, and the private rental market. In practice, home ownership is out of reach for many service users. Access to the social housing system is restricted by decades of underfunding. Although it remains an important housing option for women and children escaping domestic and family violence, and is valued for the ongoing affordability and tenure security it offers, in many areas it is inaccessible to women leaving abusive partners, as well as other groups facing barriers in the private housing market.

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018–19, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 30 August 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018–19, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 30 August 2022.



Even if they can afford rent, women leaving perpetrators of violence may also face discrimination from landlords, or be unable to effectively compete with childless, working couples in tight markets where landlords can choose from a large number of prospective tenants. This can be compounded if they have a poor tenancy record due to the behaviour of a violent ex-partner or are stigmatised due to receipt of a government-funded housing subsidy. The shortage of affordable housing means that women can feel pressured to accept accommodation that is substandard, too far from critical support networks, or located in neighbourhoods or settings that feel unsafe or are unsafe.

Housing choices may be further constrained by the actions of a perpetrator who continues to harass the victim-survivor. If women reject a housing offer due to fear, trauma, or a desire to provide appropriate living conditions for their children, this can be perceived by services or defined within policies as declining support or failing to engage, which can impact future offers. When responding to domestic and family violence, policy makers and service providers need to recognise the complexity of the circumstances within which women exercise agency and make decisions, and direct support and assistance accordingly. The main challenge facing services and their clients is the lack of pathways by which women can move on from crisis and transitional responses into secure, long-term housing.

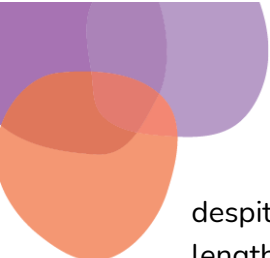
## Specialist domestic and family violence crisis accommodation

The demand for refuges outstrips the number of places available, with reports that more than half of women seeking help are unable to be accommodated. The lack of space in refuges has led to the use of hotels, motels and caravan parks as a form of crisis accommodation. However, this is problematic for many reasons including the:

- lack of support services;
- cost involved;
- inappropriateness of such accommodation for children; and
- security concerns.

Gaining access to refuges can also be complicated for those: with teenage sons; who are pregnant; who are under the age of 18; and/or who have pets.

Refuges are not designed to provide long-term accommodation. However, a lack of viable options post-refuge accommodation, with exit pathways frequently overburdened, is resulting in women and their children remaining in refuges for up to six months. This is due to a lack of social housing; limited affordable and accessible private rental housing; and the limited incomes of many women leaving abusive partners. The lack of social housing,



despite a clear need for it, is considered to be one of the major factors contributing to the length of time women remain in refuges.

The true demand for specialist domestic and family violence crisis accommodation is still unknown. State-wide modelling is needed to provide an accurate picture of this demand. What we do know is that there is currently not capacity to respond to demand for refuge accommodation. Increasingly, motel/hotel accommodation is unsuitable for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, whose lives are at significant risk. They are simply unable to provide the level of care and safety needed. The reliance on hotels/motels as a form of emergency accommodation is endangering the lives of victim-survivors of domestic and family violence – adults and children. Funding/brokerage spent on motels/hotels for domestic and family violence crisis accommodation is failing as a solution.

Currently, the specialist domestic and family violence crisis accommodation system does not have capacity to respond to demand. What is required is additional refuge capacity; resourcing for specialist support options to manage complex risk and keep victim-survivors safe from their perpetrators; and more standalone properties so refuge providers have increased flexibility to house victim-survivors according to need – including those who have multiple and complex needs.

### A new way of funding crisis accommodation?

It is possible to draw on international research in relation to estimating the resourcing required to adequately fund crisis housing for victim-survivors, to guide a new way of thinking about and funding crisis accommodation for Western Australia. For example, the Guidance on Estimating Resource Requirements for a Minimum Package of Services module developed as part of a United Nations Joint Global Programme: Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence: Core Elements and Quality Guidelines<sup>11</sup>. The Guidance offers a model for costing and estimating the quantum of crisis housing that involves unpacking prevalence data, population profile, geographical layout, and establishment and operation costs to determine the number of refuge places needed in any jurisdiction. The model uses the European standard of one refuge place or family space per 10,000 inhabitants.


### Safe at home approaches

A recent shift in thinking questioned why victim-survivors should be the ones who leave, as opposed to the person responsible for the violence. This change in approach has led to the development of various safe at home schemes in Australia which operate from a social

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/12/essential-services-package-for-women-and-girls-subject-to-violence>





justice perspective where: the perpetrator is solely accountable for their violence and controlling behaviours – which should mean that their partners and children are not made homeless, or displaced from families, friends and schools<sup>12</sup>.

This policy approach seeks to keep domestic and family violence victim-survivors in their home with the perpetrator removed. It contrasts with the previous response to domestic and family violence which involves women and children leaving the home, often out of sheer necessity to ensure their safety. Spinney has highlighted that whilst refuges have played a pivotal role in assisting those affected by domestic and family violence, they have advertently normalised a situation that sees women and children becoming homeless in order to leave a perpetrator of domestic and family violence<sup>13</sup>.

However, this is not to deny that barriers exist and need to be overcome to ensure the safety of victim-survivors who remain in their home. It should also be stressed that it is not considered appropriate in all circumstances but may be a suitable option in lower risk situations.

Women and children need to be able to afford to remain in the family home. Preventing homelessness through the subsidisation of these families may be cost effective as well as equitable.

Risk assessments need to be professionally conducted.

Women and children need to *feel* safe as well as be safe. They may need support to feel emotionally confident enough to remain in the home. They may also need practical and legal support to increase their physical safety.

Perpetrators need to have somewhere to live or they will be more likely to try to return to the family home.

Adequate funding is needed so referrals do not have to be put on hold.


Culturally appropriate services are required for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The [HAP Domestic Violence Project Evaluation: Overarching Report](#) recognised that Stay at Home schemes may not be suitable for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as a result of complicated extended kinship relationships, their location in small communities where the perpetrator and the perpetrator's family reside, low income, or a desire not to engage with the criminal justice system<sup>14</sup>. Some have also raised concerns that it will lead to the greater criminalisation and homelessness of Aboriginal men.

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<sup>12</sup> Breckenridge, J., Chung, D., Spinney, A., & Zufferey, C. (2016). National mapping and meta-evaluation outlining key features of effective "safe at home" programs that enhance safety and prevent homelessness for women and their children who have experienced domestic and family violence: Final report. Sydney: ANROWS.

<sup>13</sup> Spinney, A. (2012). Home and safe? Policy and practice innovations to prevent women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence from becoming homeless (AHURI final report, no. 196). Melbourne, VIC: AHURI.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Breckenridge, Jen Hamer, BJ Newton and Kylie Valentine 2013 Final Evaluation Report for Long-Term Accommodation and Support for Women and Children Experiencing Domestic and Family Violence. Centre for Gender-Related Violence Studies (CGRVS) and Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC).



There needs to be a consistent approach by the police and judicial services towards the perpetrator's exclusion from the home.

Adequate funding so women in private rental and owner-occupied homes can sustain their accommodation.

*There is so much behind-the-scenes work around applying a family violence lens and really listening to the client. It takes time. The whole system is under pressure and when there are no housing options it adds extra pressure onto other recovery aspects.*

Several factors guide whether a victim-survivor feels comfortable remaining in their home. Breckenridge et al<sup>15</sup> argue that: legislation, legal and judicial practices, practical and emotional support services, affordability issues, and integrated domestic and family violence programs can all influence women's decisions to remain in their home following the removal of a violent partner, their confidence in their ability to do so safely, and their actual safety. Strengthening each of these aspects may expand the number of people who are able to remain in their own home without the experience of violence.

## Rebuilding lives

The availability of appropriate housing is key to victim-survivors having the opportunity to recover from the impact of having lived with a perpetrator of domestic and family violence. As noted by the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (p 29):

The first pillar of recovery is housing. Safe and affordable housing is central to stabilising a victim's life. Without the certainty of knowing where they will live, a victim cannot plan for the future: if they are not returning home, they need to know where their children will go to school, how they themselves will get to work, or even where they might seek work. With stable accommodation they can turn their mind to rebuilding their own and their children's lives and (re)connecting with the community<sup>16</sup>.


For children, the lack of safe, secure, and affordable housing can compound the negative consequences of having lived in a home with a perpetrator of domestic and family violence. It can contribute to poor mental health and wellbeing, poorer educational outcomes, a range of behavioural issues, and trauma. Childhood experience of domestic and family violence has also been linked to a greater likelihood of adult homelessness<sup>17</sup>. The negative

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<sup>15</sup> Breckenridge, J., Chung, D., Spinney, A., & Zufferey, C. (2016). National mapping and meta-evaluation outlining key features of effective "safe at home" programs that enhance safety and prevent homelessness for women and their children who have experienced domestic and family violence: Final report. Sydney: ANROWS.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rcfv.com.au/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/position-statements/out-of-the-shadows/911-out-of-the-shadows-domestic-and-family-violence-a-leading-cause-of-homelessness-in-australia/file>



impact of domestic and family violence on children may be minimised if their housing situation is stabilised as quickly as possible. It may help alleviate the trauma of losing their home, or the threat of it, and the associated outcomes such as needing to move schools and being away from their peers and other support networks.

The availability of crisis housing sits alongside the right of victim-survivors to live safely in their own homes. We know however that this is simply not possible for many victim-survivors, and that to be and feel safe, they must leave their own home. The availability of crisis housing also sits alongside the need for transitional and long-term housing, and investment in social and affordable housing. Housing must be earmarked for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. AIHW data consistently demonstrates that nearly half of all people seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services do so because of domestic and family violence. Therefore, it is logical that nearly half of all new social housing be earmarked for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

The rebuilding of lives and the move towards recovery from the trauma of experiencing domestic and family violence requires stable, secure, and affordable housing. This is a key element of recovery.

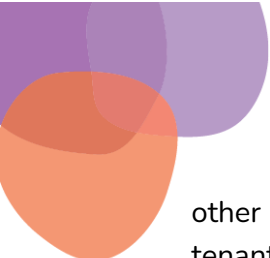
## Providing victim-survivors with a genuine long-term option

The availability of safe, secure, and affordable housing is critically important when it comes to providing victim-survivors with a genuine, long-term option that enables them to permanently leave a violent partner. A lack of safe and appropriate housing options may be enough reason to prevent some women leaving an abusive partner. Housing instability may also result in some victim-survivors who have attempted to leave returning to live with the perpetrator. Ensuring that safe, secure, affordable and suitable housing is available thus plays a critical role in enabling victim-survivors of domestic and family violence to permanently leave a perpetrator.

*“Women are going back to partners because they can't achieve another housing outcome. And I mean, years ago, that wasn't the case. You could always get people housed, especially with DV and if children were involved. But there's just nothing – the pressure is massive.”*

Moving from short-term or transitional accommodation into permanent, independent housing is very difficult, and sometimes unachievable, for women and children affected by domestic and family violence.

Reliance on private rental market subsidies as a way to achieve housing outcomes is problematic in tight markets and such assistance cannot always successfully overcome



other barriers like limited affordable supply and competition from other prospective tenants.

Investment is needed in a range of affordable housing options, including safe, secure, and supportive social and affordable housing. Specialist domestic and family violence crisis accommodation service providers play a critical role. However, the system is under considerable pressure, much of it deriving from the lack of realistic, appropriate 'exit points' from crisis assistance into stable, long-term housing. Provision of such 'exit points' is beyond the capacity of services, which must rely on other parts of the system, including social housing and the private rental market, to accommodate their clients.

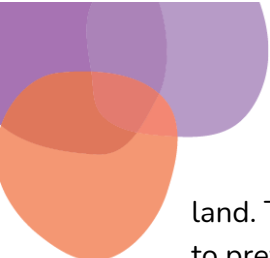
*“While temporary accommodation is critical for women first leaving their violent partners, it isn’t easy when you have young children, and without the prospect of long-term housing options we see too many women returning to violent partners rather than try and navigate the system.”*

There is little integration between the domestic and family violence response and the wider housing system, and therefore women leaving perpetrators of violence are routinely unable to obtain long term, safe, affordable, accessible and appropriate housing.

It is important to note that victim-survivors of domestic and family violence represent a cross-section of society, with varying, sometimes layered, and often complex needs. They encompass young women, women with children, older women, women of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women or children with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, the LGBTIQ+ community, and those in rural and remote areas. Housing solutions need to account for the differing needs of these groups and may need to be tailored accordingly, in order to be effective.

A different housing response may be necessary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing family violence in rural and remote areas. There is a need for recognition of, and sensitivity towards, possible mistrust of government and community services. There can be a fear that child protection services will become involved or that it will be difficult to have children returned if they have been placed in out-of-home care if the housing situation does not appear to be stable or secure. There may also be a reluctance to involve the criminal justice system any further due to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

However, should longer-term housing solutions be required, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children may need to leave town, and thus their community and



land. This separation from kin, land, and associated cultural responsibilities may be enough to prevent some women from leaving.


Long-term housing options generally fall within one of the following categories:

- i. social housing;
- ii. the private rental market; or
- iii. owning a home (either outright or with a mortgage).

If none of these options are viable, homelessness may result. However, there are barriers to each of these alternatives that prevent them being a realistic option for many victim-survivors:

- There is a severe shortage of available and affordable housing, including a shortage of social housing and affordable rental accommodation. The shortage of long-term affordable housing prevents women making the transition from temporary accommodation in homelessness services to permanent housing;
- Poverty, often resulting from the abuse itself, is a significant obstacle to remaining in the home and sustaining this housing;
- Certain groups of women (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse and refugee women, women with disabilities, and women from rural and remote areas) may be additionally disadvantaged with reduced access to refuge accommodation and other housing options meeting their specific needs;
- The loss of an income that previously contributed to the mortgage or rent.
- A shortage of appropriate housing in terms of cost, location, and/or facilities for those with a disability;
- Lack of rental history;
- Discrimination against single parent families and pets;
- The partner's previous damage or failure to pay rent may negatively reflect on their rental history;
- A more tenuous link to the workforce due to not working fulltime, casual employment, being self-employed, or not employed.
- Being older; and
- Being a sole parent.

Social housing may be the better housing option for those who require long-term housing assistance or have support needs. However, lengthy waiting lists and a limited number of suitable properties may result in considerable delay and do not solve the immediate need for housing. As a result, some victim-survivors are forced into the private rental market. Those leaving a violent partner are likely to be faced with several difficulties as they are left to provide for the cost of housing on their own. They may also incur the expense of



establishing a new household, such as obtaining furniture, appliances and household goods. Some victim-survivors may not have been recently employed or their employment history may have been negatively affected by the violence.

Some recommendations put forward by ANROWS in a recent domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness research synthesis include<sup>18</sup>:

- Increasing the availability of immediate and long-term housing options for women leaving violence, including crisis accommodation, rental assistance, affordable housing and “Safe at home” programs, in order to cater for the diverse needs of women and children escaping violence;
- Providing specialist domestic and family violence services, including refuges, with adequate resourcing for the provision of crisis assistance and support for accessing justice services, as well as for case managing referral to financial counselling, employment programs and long-term housing support. Victim/survivors need more consistent help to attain their preferred housing, whether this is to remain in their home, access private rentals, or apply for public housing; and
- Embedding specialist domestic and family services, including refuges, in their local community, operating through a hub-and-spoke model. This model allows practitioners to provide longer-term support to women as they transition between accommodation.

## Conclusion

There are multiple systemic and cultural barriers that make leaving the family home almost inconceivable to victim-survivors of violence. Many find it just too hard to contemplate leaving an abusive partner and their home as the alternative solutions are filled with uncertainty.

A long-term solution to the housing insecurity faced by many of those seeking to leave a perpetrator of domestic and family violence must be found so that victim-survivors do not have to choose between either continuing to live with the perpetrator or the likelihood of chronic homelessness and insecurity. The provision of long term suitable, secure, safe and affordable housing will facilitate the recovery of domestic and family violence victim-survivors from the effects of having lived with violence, and make possible a better future for all concerned.

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<sup>18</sup> Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety. (2019). Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness: Research synthesis (2nd Ed.; ANROWS Insights, 07/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.



## Snapshot of women's voices<sup>19</sup>

### **Janelle**

My name is Janelle and I am twenty-eight years old with two children. We are currently residing with my husband who is abusive, even though we lived within a refuge for over six months last year.

Things got bad during the first Covid lockdown and we stayed within a refuge for a total of four months, but I could not find any housing in my own right and had to return to the family home with my husband.

The abuse escalated during this time and we returned to the same refuge accommodation again for two months. Yet once again I could not access any form of housing where myself and the children could be independent. Luckily, the refuge staff continued to visit and support us through their outreach program. I was honest with them that things weren't good, and the abuse was ongoing. They encouraged me to access refuge accommodation again, yet the reality has not changed. I still would not be able to access independent accommodation after accessing the refuge a third time.

### **Mariam**

My name is Mariam and I am 33 years old with two children aged 6 and 4.

I stayed at a refuge twice during 2020 and 2021 and received positive support from the women who work there. But I had to return to my husband both times due to there being no options for housing for me and risks to my residency through immigration if I am not living with my husband.

I only receive 'Special Benefit' through Centrelink for my children, so cannot possibly afford private rental, therefore finding independent housing away from the abuse for myself and children is impossible.

At times the abuse has increased and I have contacted the refuge for support.

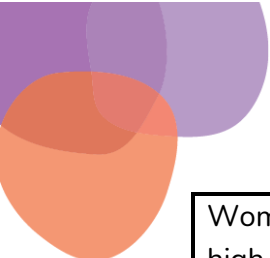
This makes me sad as I learnt so much about independence and my rights while staying in the refuge and want to start a new life with my children.

### **Sue**

My name is Sue. I am a dedicated support worker within a Refuge. The latest issue we have been facing as a service is that women face 'roadblocks' when trying to access all housing pathways. Both the community and government housing waitlists are extremely long and I would argue almost unattainable.

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<sup>19</sup> Names and some details have been changed.



Women are constantly submitting applications for rental properties which are priced too high and have at times up to fifty or so applicants interested. There are no transitional properties available, which were good options for these clients in the past. These transitional properties are accommodated as previous refuge clients are also unable to move on. Other options that were drawn on in the past such as caravan parks are fully booked from WA tourists and these types of accommodation can discriminate against our clients.

It is very sad to watch vulnerable women continue to be rejected and the impacts this has on their self-esteem and wellbeing. What I am witnessing is women who feel absolute despair as refuge accommodation is not designed to be a long-term solution or stay.

Since Covid-19 there are almost insurmountable barriers to positive outcomes for women and their children, which our sector works very hard towards. Women feel they have no other option but to live with the perpetrator and put their lives at risk. We have also had women return to their partner and when the violence has escalated, they have reached back out for assistance.

Staff are also feeling the impact as they work in conflict with their core values when they have to advise women searching for support that there are no vacancies. We are extremely concerned that 'high risk' cases are not being responded to because of the lack of vacancies and that these women are currently not evident in data.

I really hope to see some significant change soon.