

Safe and Equal Submission to the design of the Safe Places Grant: Inclusion Round

10 March 2023

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Safe and Equal acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters, community and culture.

Honouring victim survivors

Safe and Equal honours the strength and resilience of adults, children and young people who have experienced family violence and recognises that it is essential that responses to family violence are informed by their expert knowledge and advocacy. We pay respects to those who have not survived and acknowledge the lasting impacts of this preventable violence on families and communities.

About Safe and Equal

Safe and Equal is the peak body for specialist family violence services that provide support to victim survivors in Victoria. Our vision is a world beyond family and gender-based violence, where women, children and people from marginalised communities are safe, thriving and respected.

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Introduction

The Safe Places grant provides a valuable opportunity to increase the number of crisis beds available to marginalised victim survivors of family violence and we welcome the opportunity to provide input into the design of the grant.

In 2019, Safe and Equal (formerly Domestic Violence Victoria) provided feedback into the design of the first round of these grants. We acknowledge and appreciate that our call for grant recipients to be required to be either specialist family violence services, or partnered with specialist family violence services was taken on board. In Victoria, several of our member organisations were successful in receiving Safe Places grants and we are hopeful that once operational, these crisis accommodation facilities will be well integrated into existing family violence system infrastructure as a result.

This submission will not address all the questions posed in the discussion paper, but will highlight points that we consider most critical and in line with our expertise, including: concerns around the lack of operational funding, and responding directly to Questions 6 and 7 regarding assessment criteria for grant recipients.

Operational Funding

It is imperative that victim survivors housed within crisis accommodation have access to high quality support services, to ensure ongoing safety, risk management and recovery support. Demand for specialist family violence services is at unprecedented levels. In 2019, we called on the Commonwealth Government to attach ongoing operational funding to the capital funds provided via Safe Places to enable services to provide critical case management support to people staying in the new crisis accommodation. After consulting with our member services who received funding under the first round of grants, we understand that the Safe Places grant is still not providing operational funding. Services are already stretched beyond capacity and providing support to well over the number of people they are funded to work with. This is particularly true for smaller, cohort-specific family violence services to which this Inclusion Round of the grant is targeted. It is unrealistic to expect services to manage additional capacity for crisis accommodation without commensurate operational funding. It is therefore important for the Australian Government to work directly with states and territories to ensure operational funding is provided to grant recipients.

Potential eligibility criteria

Service Specialisation

We fully support that services eligible for the grant must be a specialist family violence service, capable of providing appropriate family violence services, as defined by the Discussion Paper.

We note that evidence of such providers' capability to support women and children from First Nations and refugee and migrant backgrounds, as well as victim survivors with disabilities is asked for, "where relevant." We recommend removing the reference to "where relevant," as specialist family violence providers who are supporting victim survivors from these backgrounds need to be well-equipped to deliver culturally safe, trauma-informed, accessible and inclusive family violence support.

In addition to being a specialist family violence service, we recommend that preferential treatment should be given to the following grant applicants:

1. Aboriginal, refugee and migrant, and disability family violence services – e.g. Aboriginal community controlled organisations, multicultural or ethno-specific services; or
2. Specialist family violence services that have an established track record of providing tailored, inclusive support for First Nations people, people from migrant and refugee communities, or people with disability.

Potential assessment criteria

Demand and Location

We agree with the measure of demand as criteria to identify priority locations.

The discussion paper also states that close proximity to the following infrastructure would be favourably considered:

- existing public transport networks
- other forms of established infrastructure including educational and leisure facilities
- daily needs and activity centres
- medical services
- services and amenities meeting the needs of First Nations women and children, women and children from refugee and migrant backgrounds and women and children with disability.

We support this in principle. However, we note that locations which are not close to the listed infrastructure should not necessarily be excluded, as this will likely favour urban rather than rural and regional locations.

Specialist services and appropriate support

We are supportive of the criteria currently listed. We also recommend that in addition to the points currently listed, these providers should need to demonstrate an existing

connection to the relevant cohorts in their local community to ensure appropriate, localised solutions are developed.

Capacity and capability

The discussion paper states that high quality applications must have “Confirmation women and children leaving FDV are not turned away on a basis other than a lack of availability.” We are supportive of this in principle as we do not believe anyone should be excluded from crisis accommodation based on traits or certain needs. However, there are valid reasons why a victim survivor may be turned away beyond lack of availability, such as the victim survivor declined to be placed in a specific location or region, or the available accommodation was inappropriate for the victim survivor and their children, for example, too small to accommodate a large family. This statement should be expanded to accommodate instances where this occurs.

Alternatively, if the sentiment of this criteria is to prevent against discrimination of victim survivors with certain traits or needs (e.g. gender diverse, mental health or addiction needs etc) who have traditionally been, and continue to be, excluded from family violence crisis accommodation, then we suggest a reworking of this statement to explicitly state that no clients can be discriminated against and denied access based on qualities such as race, disability, gender-identity, or additional needs such as mental health issues, addiction etc.