



Consultation on the Second Action Plan

National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children
2022-2032 | Department of Social Services

July 2026

Contents

1. Executive Summary.....	3
2. Women’s Services at Sacred Heart Mission.....	4
3. The challenge we are seeing	5
4. Recommendations.....	6
Theme 1: Whole-of-government and cross-jurisdictional commitment	6
Theme 2: Intersectional service response	7
Theme 3: Co-design and cultural safety.....	7

1. Executive Summary

More than 50% of women and children accessing homelessness services in 2022-23 were also experiencing family violenceⁱ – and the situation continues to worsen.

Access to safe housing is the crucial first step in a long journey towards safety and recovery. But more than one in five people who seek help are shuttled back and forth between homelessness and family violence services, without getting safe and appropriate accommodation.ⁱⁱ

Sacred Heart Mission is now seeing many women, and a growing number of children, in this situation. Our services are neither designed nor funded to support families, so we work with them to navigate the gaps between the homelessness and family violence systems. We hear consistently from our participants, service reviews, case managers, volunteers and sector partners that longer-term, integrated and coordinated responses to family violence and homelessness are needed.

Social housing supply is diminishing even as rates of family violence are increasing. Our systems cannot keep failing women and children.

Sacred Heart Mission's submission focuses on the National Plan's *Priority Area 5: System Integration and Workforce*. It draws on experiences from our Women's Services to highlight effective approaches, gaps in the system, and potential solutions.

Our recommendations are grouped into three themes:

1. Whole-of-government and cross-jurisdictional commitment
2. Intersectional service response
3. Co-design and cultural safety

Together, these recommendations can ensure that women, children and families experiencing violence can access safe housing and person-centred support, with no gaps that leave them at risk of homelessness.

2. Women's Services at Sacred Heart Mission

Sacred Heart Mission has been supporting people experiencing homelessness, poverty and disadvantage in Melbourne's south-east since 1982. We have a suite of women's services that are inclusive of transgender and gender non-confirming people.

The Women's House

A safe, supportive and inclusive space that provides access to meals, showers, laundry and social connection. It acts as a low-barrier entry point for access to other services. Volunteers help facilitate social connection, and a team of qualified case managers are on hand to support women with housing, physical and mental health concerns, substance abuse issues, domestic and family violence, financial and legal matters, and social and life skills.

Homefront

A set of self-contained apartments in a safe and undisclosed location, for women who have experienced homelessness and family violence. The space can accommodate up to 11 women and has 24-hour onsite support. Women who stay there are offered case management and wraparound support for as long as they need it.

Bethlehem

Long-term housing for 10 women with complex needs and histories of homelessness. The service provides community living space with 24-hour onsite support. Residents are supported to sustain their tenancies, make social connections and build daily living skills. This includes recovery support for residents with mental and physical health conditions, drug and alcohol issues, histories of domestic and family violence and other forms of abuse or trauma.

Sophia's Place

Independent living for women with complex needs, with the right support to maintain their home. It comprises 17 independent living units, with support provided as needed to sustain tenancies and build independence.

3. The challenge we are seeing

Our Women's Services were designed for adults. But we are seeing an increasing number of women presenting at the Women's House with children. These families are often navigating experiences of violence while also trying to manage their safety, legal processes, housing instability and the ongoing impacts of multifaceted trauma.

Women come to the Women's House because it is accessible, familiar and trusted, resulting in the service responding to a broad range of family violence-related needs beyond its intended scope. While frontline staff are deeply committed to providing support, many report that they feel underprepared when families present to the service. The expertise required to respond safely to women and children together, including family violence risk assessment and safety planning, child safeguarding, and navigating the criminal justice system, is not currently embedded within our service.

Moreover, victim-survivors consistently report that crisis services can be difficult to access and often cannot provide the ongoing support needed once immediate risk has passed.

Women and families may need to be assessed multiple times by multiple services. Crisis accommodation is far scarce, and people may be cycle back into homelessness once maximum stay limits have been reached. Wait times for long term housing may be 18 months or more, and child-safe housing is even harder to secure.

Sacred Heart Mission can provide a low-barrier, safe and welcoming access point for women seeking support for homelessness and family violence. We can also offer limited accommodation for women, and we are building our internal capability to support women who present with their children.

But we cannot address the growing gap between the needs of families escaping violence and the availability of safe and child-friendly accommodation. While we can help women navigate the complexities of the family violence and housing systems, we cannot bridge these gaps.

Our recommendations call for a whole-of government response with shared commitments at federal and state levels. Service responses should also be intersectional, rather than siloed.

4. Recommendations

Theme 1: Whole-of-government and cross-jurisdictional commitment

Challenges

- Lack of housing supply resulting in women and families being able to access crisis accommodation for only a short time before being returned to homelessness.
- Short-term funding for homelessness and family violence services fail to recognise the time it takes to recover from family violence, and/or homelessness and denies the sector meeting the needs of its participants. With median duration of homelessness services support increasing by 44% over five years to 2022-23.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Women are seen as ‘programmatic’ responses based on the relevant government department’s remit rather than as a whole person.

Solutions

- Government commits to social and public housing annual targets by investing in permanent supportive housing and public housing for people experiencing violence and homelessness. This can include repurposing under-utilised properties held by government and the community services sector.
- Government commits to funding homelessness and family violence services to work together. Rewarding referral and collaborative approaches to support participants for longer-term support.
- A government created and managed central national network of services and referral pathways ensuring data privacy, to make referrals accessible and fair without impacting service delivery or funding allocations.
- Design service systems around the needs of victim survivors (informed by lived experience expertise), ensuring people can access support through any entry point without repeatedly recounting their experiences or navigating disconnected services.

Outcomes

- Women and their children who have experienced family violence can access crisis and longer-term housing for as long as it takes to re-establish their lives.
- Women and their children can access wraparound support that’s right for their needs – from education to mental health, legal aid or alcohol and other drug support – without needing to re-present to multiple services.
- Homelessness and family violence peak bodies share practice briefs to provide government with both quantitative and qualitative data more frequently, to track the effectiveness of a national framework while supporting sector-wide advocacy for fairer, more inclusive service systems.

Theme 2: Intersectional service response

Challenges

- Disconnection of homelessness, family violence, health, mental health, alcohol and other drug, child protection and the criminal justice systems.
- Homelessness services designed for adults and ill-equipped to meet the needs of parents with children or unaccompanied minors.
- People forced to present to multiple services to get the support they need.

Solutions

- Commitment to an intersectional response that sees women and their children as whole people rather than a series of 'problems' to be tackled one by one across different services.
- Federal and state governments working together with service providers to ensure women and their children have clear pathways to the support they need.
- Building child-safe and family-inclusive practice across the homelessness sector.
- Supporting low-barrier engagement points where women and children can be connected to services at their own choice and pace.

Outcomes

- Significant improvements to the wellbeing of families. People no longer need to present to multiple locations and services. Reduction in acute or crisis service presentations.
- A sector highly skilled in responding to family violence, with a collaborative approach to supporting families for the duration of their recovery.

Theme 3: Co-design and cultural safety

Challenges

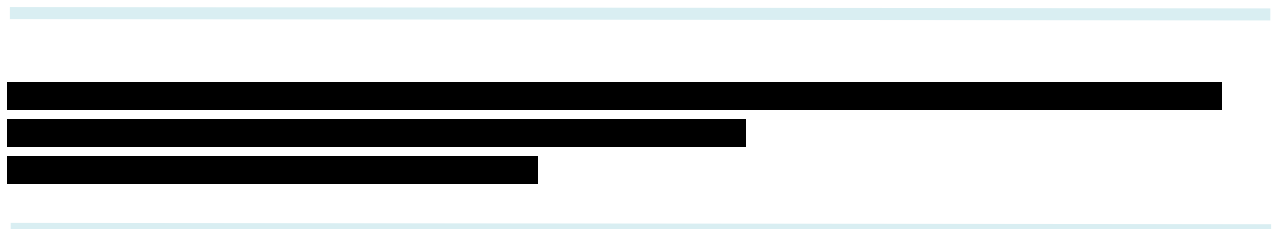
- For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women presenting to specialist homelessness services, 55% were also experiencing family violence.^{iv}
- 3 in 10 LGBTQIA+ Victorians who experienced homelessness did so because of family violence.^v
- Women with disability are almost 40 per cent more likely to experience family violence than other women.^{vi}
- About 1 in 5 (21% or 1.2 million) adults with disability in 2016 had experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a current or previous intimate partner since the age of 15.^{vii}
- Barriers to accessing support in culturally and linguistically diverse communities.^{viii}

Solutions

- Embed people with lived experience, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and culturally diverse communities as equal partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of homelessness and family violence policy, funding and service reform.
- Train and support peer and lived experience workers to promote cultural safety and have the ability to offer support in participants' first language.
- Equip homelessness and family violence services to support physical and psychosocial accessibility requirements.

Outcomes

- Reaching people who are currently cut off from services that are hard to navigate, culturally unsafe, or not designed for their needs.
- Highly skilled workers embed cross-functional capacity in their organisations.
- Longevity of workers (workforce sustainability) and adaptability of organisations to respond to the changing demands of their local environments.
- Evidence supported reduction in re-traumatisation of victim survivors
- Achieving recommendations 82 and 90, from *Yoorrook for Transformation: Racism, Workforce and Accountability* and The Victorian Government must expand support for ACCOs and Traditional Owner groups to provide self-determined housing to First Peoples, respectively.^{ix}





ⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2024, Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022–23, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 23 July 2026.

ⁱⁱ Council to Homeless Persons, “Bridging the gap between homelessness and family violence services.” Melbourne: 2025.

ⁱⁱⁱ AHM 2024, using AIHW data), Pawson, H., Parsell, C., Clarke, A., Moore, J., Hartley, C., Aminpour, F. and Eagles, K. (2024) Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024; Sydney: UNSW City Futures Research Centre <https://cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/>

^{iv} Council to Homeless Persons, “Bridging the gap between homelessness and family violence services.” Melbourne: 2025.

^v Hill, A. O., Bourne, A., McNair, R., Carman, M. & Lyons, A. (2021). Private Lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQ people in Victoria: Victoria summary report. ARCSHS Monograph Series

No. 130. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

^{vi} <https://safeandequal.org.au/understanding-family-violence/statistics/#>

^{vii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2026, People with disability, Family, domestic and sexual violence, AIHW, Australian Government

^{viii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/cald>

^{ix} Yoorrook Justice Commission, “Recommendations,” Yoorrook Justice Commission (Melbourne: Yoorrook Justice Commission, 2026), <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/reports-and-recommendations/recommendations>.

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