



Meeting of the COAG Women's Safety Council

19 May 2020

COMMUNIQUÉ

The COAG Women's Safety Council met via teleconference on 19 May 2020.

Action Plan to meet the needs of people experiencing violence during COVID-19

The Council welcomed the agreement by all governments to the National Partnership on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses. The partnership will provide up to \$130 million from the Commonwealth to states and territories to bolster family, domestic, and sexual violence supports to respond to expected increases in demand resulting from COVID-19. The Council also welcomed investments made by states and territories to support women and their children experiencing violence, which complement the Commonwealth's investment.

States and territories have received their first payment under the National Partnership of \$27.8 million, as part of the immediate response to meet urgent needs. The Council agreed to allocate the remaining \$4.7 million for 2019-20 to states and territories on a per-capita basis, with a loading for remote populations given the additional cost and complexity associated with supporting remote communities.

The Council agreed a further \$29.3 million in 2020-21 be allocated to states and territories using the same allocation formula, to provide certainty to service providers and assist with future planning. The Council will discuss the allocation of the remaining \$68.3 million on the basis of demand as further data emerges.

Supporting women and children experiencing family, domestic, and sexual violence on the road to a COVID-safe economy and society

While some services have seen increased demand since the pandemic began, trends across jurisdictions and different service types have been variable. As restrictions are eased, more data is available as women are better able to seek help. The Council noted data showing increasing rates of police charging for DVO breaches, emergency department presentations, requests for legal assistance, hotline demand, and access to online resources and support services. The Council also noted evidence of increasing complexity and severity of violence, and many women seeking help for the first time.

The Council acknowledged that as states and territories move through their plans to achieve a COVID-safe economy and society, some of the barriers women experiencing violence have faced in accessing services will likely be removed. The Council believes we need to be prepared should there be an increase in demand on the sector and specialist services following the lifting of restrictions.





The Council welcomed the launch of the Commonwealth Government's national communication campaign on Sunday 3 May 2020. The *Help is Here* campaign sends a strong message that violence is not acceptable at any time, and provides clear information on where people can access support. The campaign and associated resources can be accessed at www.dss.gov.au/help-is-here-campaign.

The Council acknowledged the complementary state and territory communication campaigns, and the importance of consistent messaging from all levels of government to support women impacted by violence to reach out for support.

The Council also welcomed the recently launched [National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan](#) (the Plan). The Plan recognises the significant impact domestic, family, and sexual violence has, and will continue to have, on people's wellbeing. The Council supported the actions related to addressing domestic, family, and sexual violence as part of COVID-19 recovery efforts.

Enhancing data to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the safety of women and their children

The Council recognised that data on the impact of COVID-19 on women's safety is still emerging, and noted the importance of accurate data in understanding the scale and complexity of the issue. To assist the Council's discussions and prioritisation of the remaining funding under the National Partnership, all jurisdictions committed to working collaboratively and to provide data to demonstrate the impact of COVID-19 on the safety of women and their children, relative to the months prior to COVID-19. Data to inform discussions includes:

- qualitative information and case studies illustrating changes in demand or the complexity of client need and service provision from specialist domestic violence services
- quantitative information on demand for family and sexual violence services and mainstream services (such as general mental health, and emergency accommodation)
- calls, texts and webchat data from helplines, including Coronavirus-related contacts
- police and court data, including information on call outs, issuance and breaches of, violence orders or other interim order applications and proceedings
- health data including hospitalisation rates for physical violence injuries and demand for forensic medical services
- access to online resources including number of views of key websites and safety app downloads.
- workforce and employment outcomes data from COVID funding for the domestic, family and sexual violence and related sectors and for the sector more broadly.

Help is available if you, or someone you know, is experiencing violence. In the case of an emergency call 000. For information, support and counselling contact 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit www.1800respect.org.au or Mensline Australia (1300 789 978) or www.mensline.org.au

