

# **EMBOLDEN SA INC:**

## **POSITION PAPER ON HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC, FAMILY & SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

July 2020

## **About Embolden**

Embolden is the statewide peak body of organisations working to respond to and eliminate domestic, family and sexual violence in South Australia.

Our members provide services that promote women and their children's safety and wellbeing, and work to prevent and respond to violence against women.

We lobby and advocate for women's rights to respect, safety and self determination, and represent providers of specialist services in the domestic, family and sexual violence and related sectors, including services that work with men who use violence against women and Aboriginal specialist services.

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

Embolden acknowledges and respects Aboriginal peoples as the state's first peoples and nations, and recognises Aboriginal peoples as traditional owners and occupants of land and waters in South Australia. Embolden recognises that their spiritual, social, cultural and economic practices come from their traditional lands and waters, that they maintain their cultural and heritage beliefs, languages and laws which are of ongoing importance, and that they have made and continue to make a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the state.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal peoples have endured, and continue to endure, injustices and dispossession of their traditional lands and waters.

We continue to pay respect to the resilience and strengths of Ancestors and Elders past, present and those emerging.

### **About this Position Paper**

This position paper has been prepared by Embolden with consultation and input from its members and key stakeholders, including women with children who have lived experience with both domestic and family violence, and issues relating to housing and homelessness in South Australia.

It is published on behalf of our member organisations, including:

Bramwell House  
Ceduna Regional Domestic Violence and Aboriginal Family Violence Services  
Coober Pedy Regional DV & Aboriginal Family Violence Service  
Cross Border/APY Lands Aboriginal Family Violence Service  
Domestic Violence Crisis Line  
Eastern Adelaide DV Service  
Fleurieu and KI DV Service  
Homelessness Gateway Service  
Women's Safety Services SA Integrated Programs  
Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Cooperation  
Limestone Coast Domestic Violence Service  
Louise Place  
Migrant Women's Support Program  
Murray Mallee and Adelaide Hills DV Service  
Ninko Kurtangga Patpangga  
Northern Adelaide DV Service  
Nunga Mi:Minar  
OARS Community Transitions  
Port Augusta Regional DV & Aboriginal Family Violence Service  
Relationships Australia (SA)  
Riverland DV Service  
Southern Adelaide DV Service  
Victim Support Service  
Vinnie's Women's Crisis Centre  
Western Adelaide DV Service  
Whyalla Regional Domestic Violence Service  
Yarredi Services  
Yarrow Place  
Yorke and Mid North Domestic Violence Service  
Zahra Foundation Australia

## Acronyms used

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>DFSV</b>    | Domestic, family and sexual violence                                  |
| <b>IPV</b>     | Intimate partner violence   |
| <b>LGBTIQ+</b> | People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer |
| <b>NGO</b>     | Non-government organisation   |
| <b>RRR</b>     | Rural, regional and remote areas                                      |
| <b>SGBV</b>    | Sexual and gender-based violence                                      |
| <b>TPV</b>     | Temporary Protection Visa   |

## Introduction

This paper details Embolden SA Inc.'s position on housing and homelessness gaps and opportunities in South Australia in the context of women and their children experiencing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women in Australia<sup>1</sup>. There is an urgent need to allow women and their children experiencing and/or escaping violence to access housing that is stable, affordable, accessible, decent and long term, with a range of suitable options and adequate support at each stage.

The term 'sexual and gender-based violence' allows us to encompass not only intimate partner or domestic and family violence, but also sexual violence committed outside of intimate relationships as well as violence against women committed by and within institutions. This term encompasses violence committed against women (both cisgender and transgender) as well as non-binary people, serving as "an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females<sup>2</sup>". The term 'sexual and gender-based violence' draws the attention to underlying drivers of violence that are rooted in rigid and binary gender norms, gender inequality, unequal power relationships, coercion and control<sup>3</sup> "that are reinforced by patriarchal social constructs"<sup>4</sup>. It includes sexual violence that can occur both within and outside the context of domestic and family violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Domestic & family violence & homelessness 2011–12 to 2013–14*. Web Report (3 February 2016) and NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre, *The impact of housing on the lives of women and children post domestic violence crisis accommodation* (Report, the NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre February 2009) and Tanya Corrie, *A wider lens: Domestic violence, homelessness and financial security* (2013) 26(2) Parity 21-23)

<sup>2</sup> The inter-agency minimum standards: for gender-based violence in emergency programming. UNFPA 2019 [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/19-200\\_Minimun\\_Standards\\_Report\\_ENGLISH-Nov.FINAL\\_.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/19-200_Minimun_Standards_Report_ENGLISH-Nov.FINAL_.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See the full definition of sexual and gender-based violence by the United Nations Refugee Agency: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/sexual-and-gender-based-violence.html>

<sup>4</sup> DV VIC 2020, *DV Vic Code of Practice*, accessed from <http://dvvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DV-Vic-Code-of-Practice-v1.0-FINAL.pdf>

Embolden is committed to partnering with State Government, other NGOs and stakeholders to improve service responses, support and outcomes for victim-survivors of SGBV, including women and their children accessing accommodation services, encompassing motels/hotels and other forms of short-term or transitional shelter, through to long-term sustainable and suitable housing.

The purpose of this paper is to:

- Clearly articulate Embolden's position on this issue, and
- Provide recommendation to services, providers, governments (state and Federal) and other stakeholders in determining policy and action priorities, and best practice

## **SUMMARY OF PRIORITY ACTION AREAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Priority Action Area 1: Strengthening safe and appropriate accommodation options and supports (including specialist women's services) for those escaping sexual and gender-based violence, especially women and their children**

#### Recommendations under Priority Action Area 1

- Commit to additional funding for specialist women's services to support children
- Implement processes that ensure funding goes to appropriately specialised services<sup>7</sup>, in collaboration with the sector
- Prioritise funding of programs and services that offer a range of exit points, with support to stabilise
- Provide funding and policy support to ensure regional, rural and remote services have capacity for remote/mobile provision of DFSV services to women and their children, including at-home visits and support
- Specialist DFSV services provided to Aboriginal people should be designed and delivered by Aboriginal people, informed by their lived experiences and principled upon self-determination
- Provide funding and policy support to create safe and suitable housing options for LGBTIQ+ people escaping violence

### **Priority Action Area 2: Addressing the immediate, medium-term and long-term accommodation needs of women who are escaping violence**

#### Recommendations under Priority Action Area 2

- Commit to principles of 'end-to-end' support funding – from crisis through to long-term stable housing
- Provide advocacy and advice to National Cabinet to extend access to Government funded services, including crisis payments and emergency housing, to all victims/survivors of domestic, family, sexual and intimate partner violence, irrespective of current visa status, across all states and territories
- Ensure that responses for housing and homelessness for Aboriginal women, children and families are not simply framed as client/customer centred response, but are enshrined in a place-based and 'Country-centred' response that ensures that any relocation does not result in cultural dislocation

**Priority Action Area 3: Increasing the stock of affordable, accessible and social housing and the support needed to enable women and their children, if they want to, to stay in their own homes through Safe at Home initiatives**

Recommendations under Priority Action Area 3

- Reinstatement of a specialist Aboriginal Housing body to complement the Aboriginal Housing Strategy and ensure that the voices of First Nations people are incorporated in the development of equitable access strategies across the state
- Reorient the SA public housing system to meet the needs of the increasingly complex needs of the growing homelessness population

**Priority Action Area 4: Improving the availability of accommodation for perpetrators who are removed from the home to ensure the safety of women and children in their homes**

Recommendations under Priority Action Area 4

- Ensure a range of accommodation options are available to men that suit their individual, cultural and community needs
- Ensure a range of suitable and safe accommodation options are available to LGBTIQ+ people who need to be removed from the family or partnership home and provided with behavioural change support
- Fund specialist men's DFV services to provide targeted rehabilitative support and work in partnership with specialist women's DFV services from a safety-first approach

**Priority Action Area 5: Assessing the effectiveness of Victoria's use of Flexible Support Packages for women and their children escaping violence as the basis of a joint review of future funding models, including assessing viability for implementation in South Australia**

Recommendations under Priority Action Area 5

- Assess viability and scope for SA implementation of funding models such as Victoria's *Family violence flexible support packages*, to deliver personalised and holistic responses to victim survivors with provision of access to support and stability, including rent subsidies of up to one year<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Family Safety Victoria 2017, *Flexible Support Packages: Summary and Next Steps*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, accessed from <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-06/Flexible%20Support%20Package%20summary%20and%20next%20steps.pdf>

- Ensure that flexible support packages are provided in culturally appropriate ways that attend to the needs of First Nations and people and those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds



## RATIONALE

Many women who leave their homes following sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including domestic and family violence, struggle to find suitable accommodation. Evidence suggests that over 90% of initial requests by domestic and family violence clients to Specialist Homelessness Services for long-term accommodation are unable to be met<sup>7</sup>. Further, current data shows that for every ten women housed through the South Australian specialist women's support sector<sup>8</sup>, approximately seven children are also housed – however, services to support children in emergency motel accommodation are currently non-existent, and dedicated children's services in shelter accommodation are severely limited.

One way in which the lack of safe, affordable housing adversely impacts those seeking to escape domestic or family violence in South Australia is the 'service loop' – an all too common situation where women and their children are forced to re-enter homelessness services as they are unable to secure safe, affordable long term accommodation.

The priority for services, agencies and policies engaging with women and their children experiencing SGBV must be to ensure that they are continuously supported throughout their journey to safety and housing stability, encompassing crisis accommodation through to long term housing solutions.

Embolden supports the direction of the Fourth National Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women (the National Plan), which states:

*"Safe, accessible and stable accommodation is crucial for the safety and recover of women and their children impacted by violence"*<sup>9</sup>

Further to this overarching principle, the Third Action Plan 2016-2019 of the National Plan identifies that:

*"Mainstream services can learn from the service delivery models of specialist women's services which provide crisis and post-crisis support, advocate for and with victims and survivors, and support them to navigate complex systems"*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, *Domestic & family violence & homelessness 2011–12 to 2013–14*, Canberra, ACT: AIHW

<sup>8</sup> Domestic Violence Crisis Line data (Jan 2020)

<sup>9</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) 2019, *Fourth Action Plan—National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, Canberra, ACT

<sup>10</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) 2016, *Third Action Plan 2016–2019 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, Canberra, ACT

Embolden supports measures by governments in all jurisdictions, and particularly at local and State levels, to take action on the priority areas of:

- **Strengthening safe and appropriate accommodation options and supports (including specialist women's services) for those escaping sexual and gender-based violence, especially women and their children**
- **Addressing the immediate, medium-term and long-term accommodation needs of women who are escaping violence**
- **Increasing the stock of affordable, accessible and social housing and the support needed to enable women and their children, if they want to, to stay in their own homes through Safe at Home initiatives**
- **Improving the availability of accommodation for perpetrators who are removed from the home to ensure the safety of women and children in their homes**
- **Assessing the effectiveness of Victoria's use of Flexible Support Packages for women and their children escaping violence as the basis of a joint review of future funding models, including assessing viability for implementation in South Australia**

Currently in SA and Australia more broadly, funding and resources for specialist DFSV support programs is not adequate to meet client housing needs, even with the current number of available accommodations.

Organisations that provide DFSV housing support and services are increasingly expected to shoulder the burden of additional clients, with minimal, if any, increased investment in support frameworks. This situation is untenable. Organisations cannot continue to provide services and support to people with more accommodation options added into the system without commensurate funding increases for specialist workers, programs and infrastructure. Any increase in crisis accommodation 'bricks and mortar' funding should not come at the expense of adequately resourcing other support structures.

Embolden recommends governments of all Australian jurisdictions increase funding to specialist women's and culturally specific services that meet the standards the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) has set out:

- A rights-based approach
- Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment
- A client-centred approach
- Women's safety is central
- Perpetrator accountability
- Accessible culturally-appropriate and sensitive services

As an AWAVA member, Embolden supports the principles of the AWAVA 2019-2020 Pre-Budget Submission, and here particularly note the need for:

- Governments of all jurisdictions to work together to extend access to government-funded services, including crisis payments and emergency housing, to all victims/survivors of domestic, family, sexual and intimate partner violence, irrespective of current visa status, across all states and territories
- Adequate and sustainable funding to meet demand for homelessness services, including specialist women's services, while ensuring that funding goes to services that are appropriately specialised, competent, safe, inclusive, accessible and culturally competent for the full range of diverse groups of women and children who need them
- All agreements that address homelessness to require that State/Territory strategies include measures to support women and children facing violence but also that funding spent under these strategies goes to services with specialist capability to address the gendered dynamics of violence and homelessness (i.e. specialist women's services and/or generalist services with documented specialist capability)<sup>11</sup>

Long term, stable accommodation that meets the needs of diverse clients and their children must be a priority. Funding and support cannot cease as families exit crisis. As families exit crisis and seek longer term accommodation options, specific supports are required to maintain financial independence, housing security and long term trauma recovery. As these supports are not currently funded, families are more likely to experience further social and subsequent housing crisis. Funding must be available post crisis to prevent the continuation of homelessness cycles. It is essential that any approach must not be seen as 'one-size-fits-all', but be adaptable and appropriate for each region, community and individual or family; be culturally appropriate with culturally competent staffing; suitably accessible; safe and supportive of clients' needs in other aspects of their lives.

While Embolden endorses the strong support for 'Safe at Home' programs and services within the South Australian context, it must be noted that such initiatives are not suitable for every cohort or individual family unit seeking support, and specialist crisis and housing services remain essential. Greater support and choice must remain a priority area, as identified in the Third National Action Plan, which notes:

*"Access to safe, accessible, appropriate and affordable crisis housing and long-term housing is of particular concern for women from diverse backgrounds and those with special needs. Barriers here can result in women remaining in violent relationships or children being removed from their mothers for protection. **While Safe at Home initiatives will be beneficial for some women, specialist women's services and homelessness services must remain an integral part of the response system**"<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Australian Women Against Violence Alliance 2019, *2019-2020 Federal Budget: Budget measures to address violence against women and their children*, Canberra, ACT

<sup>12</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) 2016, *Third Action Plan 2016–2019 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, Canberra, ACT

In particular, in order to deliver the most culturally appropriate housing and homelessness responses for Aboriginal peoples in the context of DFSV, such services should be designed and delivered by Aboriginal peoples; informed by their lived experiences; and principled upon self-determination.

Throughout 2018-2019, the number of Aboriginal women and children who received assistance from a South Australian Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS), where domestic violence was a reason for seeking assistance, was 953 Aboriginal adult women and 466 children<sup>13</sup>. Within the SA rental market, 80% of First Nations consumers still experience racial discrimination<sup>14</sup>. It is crucial that SA housing and homelessness systems should be culturally competent and free from racial bias and discrimination, particularly as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women seek housing options, including within the private rental market.

Embolden supports the assessment and implementation, where viable, of available solutions and opportunities such as refurbishing and renovating existing housing stock under public housing initiatives to reflect and meet the needs of current and future occupants, including catering for the needs of single women; women with smaller families; multigenerational families; LGBTIQ+ people; people living with disabilities; and perpetrators removed from the family home to support women and their children's safety. We support the development of programs and services that will ease housing stress and economic insecurity of women and their children resulting from their experiences of domestic and family violence, including but not limited to exploring programs such as 'rent-to-buy' schemes for those escaping violence.

Embolden notes that, even though SGBV is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men, and overwhelmingly perpetrated against women, the limited evidence base into same-gender relationships and IPV shows similar or higher rates of prevalence within LGBTIQ+ relationships<sup>15</sup>. However, there are few, if any, dedicated support services for this risk cohort<sup>16</sup>, and existing specialist women's support services are not resourced to provide such support. We support the development and provision of specialised LGBTIQ+ housing support options that are safe and suitable for LGBTIQ+ victim-survivors and perpetrators of SGBV, supported by adequate funding and in collaboration with the specialist women's safety sector.

As accommodation services for men who use violence begin to emerge in the South Australian specialist DFSV and homelessness sectors, enabling further accommodation choices for women, it is imperative that funding be provided to specialist services to support men and women seeking support. This funding should be in addition to current funding structures for specialist DFSV services.

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<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019, *Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018–19*, AIHW, Australian Government

<sup>14</sup> Shelter SA 2019, 'Racial Discrimination in the Private Rental Market' survey

<sup>15</sup> Carman M, Fairchild J, Parsons M, Farrugia C, Power J & Bourne A 2020, *Pride in Prevention: A guide to primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities*, Melbourne VIC, Rainbow Health Victoria

<sup>16</sup> See more at: <http://www.anothercloset.com.au> and <https://www.acon.org.au/what-we-are-here-for/domestic-family-violence/#domestic-family-violence>

Finally, there is a particular need for funding and policy support to ensure regional, rural and remote (RRR) services have the capacity to for remote/mobile provision of DFSV services to women and their children, including at-home visits and support. This is not currently possible due to the high demand for services, pushing RRR services back into an office based service model, wherein offices may be located hundreds of kilometres from where many women in need of safety are located. This means paying attention to the specific risks associated with isolation, wherein the further distanced women and their children are from the service areas in the bigger regional towns and cities, the more at risk of violence and housing insecurity they are. Additionally, mitigation strategies and solutions should be explored to address the vast distances DFSV Services are required to travel in course of service provision in this context.

## CONCLUSION

As the data shows, domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness and poverty for women in Australia<sup>17</sup>. Women and children who are most at risk often face additional barriers and challenges to their safety, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, people living with disability, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (in particular those on temporary visas<sup>18</sup>). We need to be providing more options, not less, for vulnerable women and children to access safe independent housing to support their journey from violence to safety.

Increasing access to safe and affordable housing, including public and social housing for victim-survivors of domestic or family violence, will support the safety of those experiencing and/or escaping abuse, especially women and their children. Investing in new and innovative housing solutions, in collaboration with industry and the specialist womens' and LGBTIQ+; mens' behavioural change; and Aboriginal family violence services sectors, may also reap significant dividends in terms of providing low-cost, safe, and effective housing outcomes for those escaping violence.

Embolden strongly advocates for increased investment in specialist women's and Aboriginal services, including services that work with men who use violence against women. Informed by a shared understanding of what supports women and their children's safety, we support multi-agency cooperation led by these services in the exploration of a number of approaches, including 'Safe at Home', prevention and response initiatives, to uphold South Australian women and their children's access to their basic and psychological needs to safe homes and communities.

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<sup>17</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

<sup>18</sup> National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence 2018, *Path to Nowhere: Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence and Their Children*