

**STATEMENT OF SUPPORT
WOMEN'S REFUGES AND HOUSING PROGRAM (WRAHP)**

Draft 8 September 2015

We, the undersigned organisations and individuals, make this Statement of Support for a long term Commonwealth /State funded Program for crisis services is needed to keep women and their children safe and housed, and to help them deal with the devastating effects of domestic violence. The urgency of providing a place of safety for victims and the particular danger and stress facing women and children in this situation sets support and housing for victims apart from other types of homelessness. A specific, dedicated secure long term source of funding is urgently needed.

In recent years women's refuges have been subsumed into the homelessness agenda and have not been recognised or adequately supported for the complex homicide prevention work they are required to provide. Escaping domestic violence is vastly different in character to homelessness and requires a specialised program. It is a crisis situation, which may eventually see the woman and her children returning to their home and community.

WRAHP is a purpose designed and adequately funded national program to provide 24 hour accessible front line, integrated support services, including crisis and transitional supported accommodation in order to help women and accompanying children who are in crisis including at risk of further injury or death as a result of domestic violence to achieve maximum safety, self-reliance and independence and safe housing pathways and solutions. This would include support and interventions that enable women to stay in or return to their homes.

Fatal and damaging domestic and family violence demands an immediate service response pending attitudinal and behavioural change from the other outcomes set out in the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

The funding sought for WRAHP is \$1,982m over 5 years.

Funding

2015-16 \$m	2016-17 \$m	2017-18 \$m	2018-19 \$m	2019-20 \$m	Total \$m
287	315.7	378.84	454.608	545.5296	1,982
\$219m+\$ 68m	10%increase	20% increase	20% increase	20% increase	rounded

The Commonwealth contribution would be \$991m. The states and territories contribution would be total \$991m over 5 years: NSW \$317m, Vic \$246.5m, Q'ld199.3m, WA \$108.9 m, SA \$71.1m, Tas \$21.6m, ACT \$16.3m and NT \$10.3m.

WRAHP will subsume funding for refuges currently received under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) which is coming to an end in 2017and other funding programs.

WRAHP will reinstate a long-term Commonwealth /State Funded Program (50/50 funding) with a legislated base: The Commonwealth /State Women's Refuges and Housing Program Act. A draft Bill based on 1994 Supported Assistance Accommodation Act (SAAP Act) is currently being prepared by women's organisations led by Women's Electoral Lobby . They are consulting nationally with key academics, experts and peak organisations.

Features include:

- Providing or arranging for the provision of integrated and specialised domestic violence services including supported accommodation including legal interventions for protection.
- Helping women and accompanying children who are fleeing domestic and family to obtain long-term, secure and affordable housing or accommodation and support services, including the choice to remain or return to their own home.
- Providing 24/7 access to women's refuges and other specialist outreach services so that police and other emergency workers have adequate access to safe and supportive services, as well providing women and children in crisis with direct access for self-referral.
- Improving and expanding service access and responses for women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, LGBTI women, CALD women and accompanying children.
- Increasing housing pathways for women and children out-of-crisis accommodation through the allocation of 30% of transitional and longer-term housing products and stock to women and children who have become homeless due to domestic violence.

- Increasing the number of women’s refuges and the *Safe at Home Programs* to provide women and children with the option of having the perpetrator removed and remaining in their home, or returning to their home when it is safe to do so.

The Program will acknowledge the well evidenced efficacy of services run by women for women and build this into funding and implementation. At the outset WRAHP will access documented unmet service information to develop an interim economic model using data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), apprehended violence orders (AVO), domestic homicide data, hospitals, child protection and other service data from each state. WRAHP will further develop an economic model that measures the costs of providing a holistic response to domestic and family violence and takes into account the costs of the suite of specialist support services including outreach services and accommodation.

We are heartened by our governments’ collective commitment to action on domestic violence. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has recognised the importance of the problem, and has developed a 12-year *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan). Over 12 years the National Plan’s stated aim is to achieve “a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children”.

The Commonwealth, state and territory governments have agreed to work together to on six National Outcomes:

1. Communities are safe and free from violence
2. Relationships are respectful
3. Indigenous communities are strengthened
4. **Services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence**
5. Justice responses are effective
6. Perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.

Echoing this commitment by COAG, the Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence report released 20 August 2015 stated in **Recommendation 20**:

10.67 The committee recognises the importance of the provision and availability of supportive housing models to assist victims of domestic and family violence to find safety for themselves and their children. The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government should play a lead role in identifying programs that could be implemented across the country, and in ensuring that specialist and 'wrap around' support services have access to dedicated, secure funding.

WRAHP supports early intervention and prevention strategies set out in the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Girls*. However, the current need for adequate crisis services and accommodation for women and children cannot be compromised. Services have been unable to meet the demand for over a decade. WRAHP separates Women’s Refuges and Housing Program funding from the general homelessness program. The proposed Program is focused on the crisis services needed to keep women and their children safe and housed and to help them through the crisis and we urge its endorsement.

Signed Women in Adult & Vocational Education Inc (WAVE)

Date 30th September 2015.....



The draft WRAHP Program Proposal and draft Bill can be viewed here <http://wel.org.au/> or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/WomensElectoralLobbyAustralia> Please send your comments / signed Statement of Support to WEL office wel@welnsw.org.au