



The Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier
Queensland Government

Dear Premier,

We, the undersigned, are writing to you about the ongoing epidemic of violence against women. Each year between 80 and 100 women die at the hands of their male partners – and a woman in Australia is more likely to be killed in her own home by her male partner than anywhere else or by anyone else (ABS Personal Safety Survey 2006 cited in DV Connect 2013). In QLD alone approximately 23 women are killed by their intimate partner every year (Queensland State Coroner cited in DV Connect 2013). **No longer is domestic violence seen as a matter for behind closed doors. Women and children are being murdered in our streets, in public areas, often in front of other members of the community.**

We are the workers on the front lines, dealing with the grim realities faced by women and children escaping domestic violence in our communities. We are the women who every day make the difference between a life of terror and a new beginning of safety and peace, a life free from violence, for each and every woman and child we support. We are the workers in refuges saving lives, and we are calling on the Government, and the community, to stand with us and take real action to end domestic and family violence.

For too long, the refuge sector has operated in silence, valuing the confidentiality and security of our clients over the need to have our situation heard. However with the decline in program funding in real terms over the years, the situation is now getting desperate. In the current climate an estimated 30-50 % of calls to DV Connect, many seeking refuge accommodation, are not able to be answered. We acknowledge that you as Premier have responded to this increased demand with increased funding to this vital service for the next twelve months. This will enable the recruitment of additional counsellors to better respond to the volume of calls and to provide immediate accommodation via motels. However, without a corresponding increase in refuge funding there are still not enough safe places for these women and children to go. Services all over the state have had staffing hours reduced and are struggling to keep up with ever-increasing demand. The lack of adequate funding and refuge accommodation is directly placing women and children at risk, and more and more frequently it is costing their lives.

The CWRG acknowledges the excellent response by the QLD government in undertaking the DV Taskforce headed by Dame Quentin Bryce and in committing to implementing all 140 of the recommendations outlined in the Not Now, Not Ever report. This Government response to domestic and family violence as well as the recent media coverage of recent DV homicides has raised community awareness of this insidious issue. However this has also resulted in an unprecedented demand for frontline services including domestic violence refuges and further action is needed to prevent more deaths.

Increase DV refuge beds

DV Connect has reported a significant increase in the number of calls by women trying to escape violent situations. Many of these women require safe havens and unfortunately the supply has not kept up with the demand. There have been no new refuge beds funded by the QLD government since 1991 and in fact since that date, the Murri Sisters refuge - the only specialist DV refuge in Brisbane for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, has lost the residential component of their service which is a devastating loss to the community and means that there are actually less funded refuge beds in QLD now than there were 24 years ago. We acknowledge that the QLD Government has committed to funding 2 new assessment centres in the Townsville & Brisbane areas to alleviate the current situation in which women and children are accommodated in motels while awaiting a refuge vacancy and this is welcomed. However this model will only provide a band-aid solution to the current demand if there are no new refuge beds for women and children to be referred to and the ongoing and increasing demand for refuge is yet to be addressed. Sadly and alarmingly, more women and children will return to unsafe situations or to the broader homelessness sector, which itself is struggling to provide pathways to affordable, sustainable and accessible housing.

Improve pathways for women to access housing

What is required to ensure that women and children have enough safe places to go, is to implement a strategy to improve pathways for women exiting refuge into stable long term housing. Keeping clients moving through crisis accommodation into long term housing frees up crisis beds for new women and children, eliminating the need for motels. Proposed solutions include: allocate additional transitional houses to existing DV refuges, expand the housing entitlement policy to include women without permanent residency as well as women listed on mortgages who are still awaiting property settlement, establish supported accommodation services for CALD women escaping DV awaiting residency with no income status once they no longer need the high level of support offered in refuge.

Fund specialised services for ATSI & CALD women and children escaping DV

Despite the high numbers reported of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing domestic and family violence, in SE QLD there is a lack of DV specific refuges for these women and children. Additionally, many refuges report high numbers of CALD women needing refuge yet there are no specific CALD refuges and very few services supporting these women. We acknowledge the excellent work done by Immigrant Women's Support Service (IWSS) and Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS) to support CALD women and children, especially those escaping domestic violence. Unfortunately these services are operating well above their capacity and we call on the Government to expand funding to these services to ensure all in need can access this support.

Increase funding to DV refuges to adequate levels

It is imperative that Government, both Federal and State, recognise the need for women's refuges as without refuges, there will be more women and children dying. Women's refuges are the most under-resourced services within the domestic violence and homelessness sector. It is vital to recognise that support and accommodation go hand in hand in keeping women and children safe. Increasing funding for refuges that is quarantined from general homelessness to adequate levels for existing refuges to implement Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award and adequate Workplace Health and Safety (WPH&S) strategies is imperative.

Provide adequate funding for mobile support services

In recent years the Government has moved more towards a model of utilising mobile support to assist women experiencing domestic violence in the community. This is a vital early intervention service which can assist women to remain safe and in some cases can prevent the need for some women to access refuge. However this model was introduced without any associated funding and refuges are providing this valuable support out of their existing funding arrangements. In some cases this has required refuges to restructure and has in-turn reduced the support available to women staying in the refuges. We recognise the value of mobile support and encourage the government to consider appropriately funding this model to ensure that all women can access the support they require, both in refuge and in the community.

Increase other frontline services

We are encouraged that the Palaszczuk government has reinstated funding to tenancy support services, and we urge you to also consider the need for funding increased access to legal services to ensure that all women have their rights fairly represented in dealing with domestic violence and resulting family law matters so that responses are timely and are being extended to protect them and their children, as well as other DV support services that can assist women and children before or after they access refuge.

No more talk – time for action

The recent community awareness around domestic violence has brought this long-term issue into the light in a way never before seen. We applaud the government and the community for being more willing than ever to discuss ways to address and end domestic violence. What we now ask for is real action. Raising awareness without also increasing the capacity of front-line services to deal with the increased demand places women and children at risk. We as the front-line workers do not wish to read about any more deaths in the media, knowing that they could possibly have been prevented with increased resources allocated to the DV sector, particularly to women's refuges.

The Combined Women's Refuge Group (SE QLD) has been advocating for the interests of women and children escaping domestic and family violence; and the services which provide them with information, referral, accommodation and support for over 30 years. We recently produced a position paper entitled "More than just a bed. The contribution of women's refuges in QLD", which will be launched on 22nd October 2015. For further launch event details, or to request a full copy of this report, please contact cwrg_seqld@hotmail.com or go to www.cwrg.org.

We look forward to the opportunity to meet with you and will continue to work for a safer community for all women and children.

Yours sincerely,

- BDVS Micah Projects
- Caboolture Domestic Violence Service
- Chisholm Inc
- Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc
- Gareema, Save the Children
- Immigrant Women's Support Service

- Ipswich Women's Shelter
- Jebb, Save the Children
- Koolkuna/Kalparrin, Uniting Care Communities
- Koongoora Inc
- Lions inPlace Inc
- Macleod Accommodation Support Service Gold Coast
- Madonna House, Ozcare
- Majella House, Ozcare
- Mary & Martha's, Lutheran Community Care
- Maybanke Accommodation & Crisis Support Service
- Murri Sisters
- Najida refuge, SunnyKids
- Sonshine Sanctuary
- The Services Union
- Windana Support Centre Inc
- Women Helping Women
- Women's House Shelta
- Women's Legal Service