



Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: spla.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Re: Submission to the House of Representatives Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into homelessness in Australia

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the House of Representatives Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into homelessness in Australia.

NTCOSS is a peak body for the social and community service sector in the Northern Territory (NT), and an advocate for social justice on behalf of the people and communities who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage.

NTCOSS represents a varied service sector, with members bringing different experiences and perspectives relating to homelessness from across the region. NTCOSS acknowledges that a number of our member organisations with specific expertise in this area have provided submissions relating to the Terms of Reference, including the NT housing peak body (NT Shelter) and specialist services that provide accommodation and case management support to those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This submission will pay particular attention to the risk of homelessness of women and children affected by domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) (point 6(a) in Terms of Reference), one of the highest identified cohorts accessing homelessness assistance in the NT.¹

The NT has 12 times the average rate of homelessness,² as well as experiencing the highest rates of DFSV in Australia.³ On average there are 61 domestic and family violence incidents on a typical day and four domestic and family violence related homicides per 100,000 people per year.⁴ Aboriginal women are particularly impacted by this form of gender based violence, accounting for 89% of all

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homeless services 2018-19, accessed at https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a9055e27-8e4a-44d8-ad7c-9baf43c01415/NT_factsheet.pdf.aspx

² NT Shelter, 'NT Shelter About', accessed at <https://ntshelter.org.au/>

³ Territory Families, 'The Northern Territory Gender Equality Framework 2019-2024 - 'Consultation Document', 2019, Northern Territory Government

⁴ NT Government, 'Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018-2028

DFSV victims in the NT.⁵ The impacts of DFSV as a driver of poverty and disadvantage are well documented; they include social isolation and exclusion; economic disadvantage (particularly regarding how changes in circumstances can impact income); and is the main reason women leave the home in Australia.⁶

Overcrowded living arrangements that are prevalent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the NT have significant ramifications relating to DFSV and homelessness. The 2007 *Little Children are Sacred* report drew direct links between the shortage of housing in remote, regional and urban parts of the NT and DFSV, and recommended critical mass construction in targeted communities as well as urgent repairs to existing housing stock.⁷ While both the NT and Commonwealth Governments have increased housing investment in the NT since 2007, extensive gaps still remain in housing infrastructure and government funded housing and homelessness services across the NT.⁸

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare identified that in the 2018-19 period, 1 in 26 people in the NT received homelessness assistance, higher than the national rate (1 in 86).⁹ The top reason for clients seeking assistance was identified as domestic and family violence (46%), with the majority of clients identified as women.¹⁰ As survivors of DFSV are overwhelmingly more likely to be forced to leave the home to escape violence, this means women in these situations are forced into primary homelessness, or, in the majority of cases, continue living with the abusive partner.

Priority areas of focus in relation to the risk of homelessness of women and children affected by DFSV:

1. Transitional and long term accommodation assistance
 - a. Appropriate and flexible funding streams for specialist services in the NT are required for provision of transitional and long term accommodation services, including accommodation and housing/tenancy support, to give victims of DFSV more options when leaving crisis accommodation;
 - b. Increased support, including through care, for female prisoners to access accommodation services, and other social supports, to help reduce the likelihood of re-entry into unsafe environments.¹¹
2. Prevention and early intervention strategies
 - a. Increased flexible funding for the development of integrated service models that focus on early intervention and prevention for individuals, families and communities;
 - b. Increased funding for outreach programs to improve responses that support victims of DFSV in their homes and communities providing flexible and accessible points

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2017, 4510.0 Recorded Crime – Victim, 2014-2016

⁶ Spinney 2012, Home and safe? Policy and practice innovations to prevent women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence from becoming homeless

⁷ Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007

⁸ NT Shelter 2019, Pre-budget Submission to the NT Government 2020 – 2021 accessed at https://ntshelter.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NTShelter2020_21PreBudget_SubmissionNTG.pdf

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homeless services 2018-19, accessed at

https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a9055e27-8e4a-44d8-ad7c-9baf43c01415/NT_factsheet.pdf.aspx

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ Stephanie Zilman (2017) 'Domestic violence: Women leaving prison 'need proper housing' to avoid abuse, service providers say' ABC report 26 May 2017, accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-26/women-leaving-prison-need-proper-housing/8558914> and Bevis, M., Atkinson, J., McCarthy, L., & Sweet, M. (2020). *Kungas' trauma experiences and effects on behaviour in Central Australia* (Research report, 03/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS

through which information about service provision, and follow-up contact are available.¹²

3. Addressing the 'housing affordability crisis in the NT'¹³ to give victims of DFSV more agency in leaving the home by
 - a. extending the NT Government's head-leasing initiative and the National Rental Affordability Scheme to meet continuing need;
 - b. reforming the Commonwealth Rent Assistance Scheme to ensure it significantly improves rental affordability for those on low incomes and is responsive to local housing market conditions;¹⁴
 - c. Maintaining an increase to the rate of JobSeeker (Newstart) and other related payments introduced during the COVID-19 response (in line with the national Raise the Rate campaign), allowing recipients to maintain an adequate standard of living;
 - d. Private rent assistance including bond loans, rental grants, rental subsidies and relief, and payment of relocation expenses for women and children affected by DFSV, where they are unable to remain in the home.
4. Addressing public housing shortages
 - a. Continued development of NT Housing Strategy to create a more effective system in the NT that assists women and children affected by DSFV;
 - b. Participating in the proposed Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program.¹⁵

Please contact NTCOSS if you require any further information on the above, via email admin@ntcoss.org.au or telephone on 08 8948 2665.

Kind regards,



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CEO
NTCOSS

¹² Kelly, L., & Humphreys, C. (2001) 'Supporting Women and Children in Their Communities: Outreach and Advocacy Approaches to Domestic Violence' in J. Taylor-Brown (Ed.), *What Works in Domestic Violence Intervention?* (pp. 231-271). London: Whiting and Birch.

¹³ AnglicareNT, *Affordable Housing Hard to Find in NT*, accessed at <https://www.anglicare-nt.org.au/news/affordable-housing-hard-find-nt/>

¹⁴ ACOSS, 'Surviving, not living: the (in) adequacy of Newstart and related payments' accessed at <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SurvivingNotLiving.pdf>

¹⁵ Community Housing Industry Association, 'Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP)', accessed at <https://www.communityhousing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SHARP-Program.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1mVAcZS0brXfw5evX-uLtWhro4OgBgSsysUZwCldxyWv5sJpIV7jaLhE>