



Submission to Victorian  
Government:

# **The 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy**

## Acknowledgment of Country

No to Violence acknowledges First Nations Peoples across these lands; the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters. We pay respect to all Elders, past, present and emerging. We acknowledge a deep connection with country which has existed over 60,000 years. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and this was and always will be First Nation's land



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## About No to Violence

No to Violence (NTV) is the largest peak body in Australia representing organisations and individuals working with men to end family violence. We are guided by the values of accountability, gender equity, leadership, change, and respect. Meaning, we must account for our work by being rigorous and evidence-informed, that all our work is supportive of gender equity, that we continue to use our platform to lead a national conversation on the need to address men's use of violence and abuse, that we hold hope that change is possible, and that we engage our clients and stakeholders in a manner that respects their dignity and human rights.

NTV provides support and advocacy for the work of specialist men's family violence interventions carried out by organisations and individuals. The work undertaken by specialist men's family violence services is diverse and includes but is not limited to; Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP); case management, individual counselling, policy development and advocacy, research and evaluation, and workforce development and capability building.

NTV also provides a range of training for the specialist men's family violence workforce including a graduate certificate in partnership with Swinburne University, as well as professional development for all workforces who come into contact, directly and indirectly, with men using family violence.

NTV is a leading national voice and plays a central role in the development of evidence, policy, and advocacy to support the work of specialist men's family violence nationally and in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania.

## About Our Members

NTV represents 183 members Australia-wide. Our membership structure is inclusive of individuals and organisations ranging from specialist services to individuals and groups who have an interest in preventing and responding to men's family violence.

NTV's specialist members are those who provide specialised men's family violence services, including Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP), case management, and individual counselling. All specialist member services that work directly with men who have used family violence include family contact work, which consists of counselling and ongoing risk assessment and risk management directly with victim survivors of family violence. In Victoria, specialist services are funded to provide approximately 4000 places in Men's Behaviour Change Programs and offer support to 1300 men through case management.

NTV's associate members are diverse. They work in community, health, legal and corporate services, often coming into contact with men who have used family violence. Many associate members have developed policy and practices to prevent and respond to staff or clients identified as using family violence. Associate members also advocate in their communities and workplaces against men's use of family violence. All NTV members are committed to changing the social structures that underpin men's use of family violence against women and children.

## Summary of recommendations:

**Question 1: We want your input on what actions we should take to ensure we seek, hear and respond to people who need and use social and affordable housing, so that people are at the centre of a future social and affordable housing system.**

1. Acknowledge the interrelationship between homelessness and family violence and develop a gender-responsive approach.
2. Ensure effective community consultation with diverse communities who face unique housing challenges because of family violence. This includes First Nations' communities, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals, older Australians and people with disabilities, from the perspective of both victim-survivors and men who use violence.

**Question 2: What actions will enable people to access social housing, sustain their tenancies, and move between different housing options as their needs change?**

3. Establish a collaborative multi-agency approach to homelessness across the housing sector, family violence sector, and other sectors which provide social support.
4. Address the structural barriers to successful engagement with social housing.
5. Expand the use of head leasing program to assist men who use family violence to transition into the private rental market which supports victim-survivors to remain in their homes when safe to do so.

**Question 3: What are the most important features of affordable housing? (e.g. price, location, security of tenure, access to transport or daily amenities, connection to support services etc.)**

6. Ensure that appropriate social housing and crisis accommodation options are available for men who use family violence.
7. That specialty accommodation services for men who use family violence provide effective pathways to men's behavioural change interventions and associated case management services.
8. That affordable housing is placed in locations that allow easy access to community services, daily amenities and support services, via public transport.
9. That the Energy Rating standards for affordable housing is strengthened from 6 stars to 8 stars to ensure new buildings have sustainable, climate resilient design that ensure low energy consumption and costs as well as healthy living during climate events.

#### Question 4: What actions will support people to find and obtain an affordable home?

10. Increase the availability of accommodation services for men who use family violence, to ensure that victim-survivors can remain in the home when appropriate.
11. Build evaluation into perpetrator accommodation services to build the evidence around the effectiveness of such programs in increasing safety for women and children and for quality improvement.
12. Strengthen referral pathways between police and accommodation services for men who use family violence.

#### Question 7: What do we need to do to ensure housing supply meets the needs of people with specific support and housing needs?

13. Ensure accommodation services for men who use family violence meet the needs of this diverse group, including services with tailored approaches for First Nations' men, men from migrant and refugee backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ individuals, older men and men with disabilities.
14. Increasing availability of new medium-term and long-term accommodation services for men who use family violence linked to continued involvement in behaviour change programs.
15. Ensuring that the demand and supply modelling for new affordable housing correctly accounts for the number of victim survivors' already in the refuge system as well as increase demand over time.

#### Question 9: How do we strengthen our partnership approach to build a stronger and more effective social and affordable housing system?

16. Build the capacity of the housing and real estate sectors to identify and appropriately respond to family violence through further training and education.

#### Question 10: How can we engage with you as we develop new initiatives over the course of this strategy?

17. Prioritise engagement with those who have lived experience of family violence and homelessness, ensuring that this approach is victim-survivor driven.

## Discussion

**Question 1: We want your input on what actions we should take to ensure we seek, hear and respond to people who need and use social and affordable housing, so that people are at the centre of a future social and affordable housing system.**

### *People at the centre*

We support the Government's aim to place people at the centre of the affordable and social housing strategy. The process of developing and delivering the strategy must centre victim-survivors of family violence and draw from their lived experience.

We will explore the process for utilising the lived experiences of both victim-survivors and perpetrators further under question 10.

### *Family violence and the Safe at Home Approach*

To achieve the goal of centring people with the strategy, the housing needs of Victorians must be considered holistically. Crucially, the interrelationship between family violence and homelessness must be acknowledged and responses to homelessness and housing insecurity must have a gender-sensitive approach.

Family violence is the leading contributor to rates of homelessness in Victoria, with victim-survivors making up 44 per cent of those presenting to homelessness services.

Historically, there has been an expectation on women fleeing violent relationships to leave their homes and stay in refuges or other housing services to escape the violence. In recent years, this expectation has been replaced with the idea that women and children should be able to remain safely in their home while the perpetrator is removed. This has been implemented through the 'Safe at Home' approach which exists in most jurisdictions in Australia.

There are many benefits to an arrangement where the victim-survivor and her children can remain in the home if it is safe to do so, including:

- Re-housing the person using violence can provide immediate respite from the constant fear and anxiety caused by the presence of the perpetrator in the home.
- Victim-survivors do not have to experience the stress of having to leave their family home in a time of crisis and move into other accommodation in a different area.
- If victim survivors are well-established in their local area, they can utilise existing formal and informal social support networks.
- Remaining in the home may result in the woman feeling more empowered and having an increased sense of choice and measure of control.

The program is not intended to replace refuges or specialist homelessness services, rather to exist as part of a suite of interventions that women may choose. Refuges and specialist homelessness services still exist as an option for women where the nature of violence does not allow them to safely remain in their home.

In Victoria, the Safe at Home approach has been poorly coordinated, and as a result, is not effectively supporting victim-survivors of family violence to remain in their homes. Each key actor within the approach, including police, specialist family violence services, justice and housing sectors, have been funded to engage with Safe at Home, but these systems are not yet working together to deliver meaningful outcomes.

No to Violence supports the approach taken by Safe at Home - women should not be forced to leave their home in order to leave the violence and perpetrators must be held accountable for their violence. However, in order to increase safety for victim survivors, this approach needs to account for the accommodation needs of men who use violence. Requiring men who use violence to leave their homes without alternative accommodation increases the chances of them returning to the family home, despite protection or exclusion orders. This has been a significant barrier for Victoria Police, who have historically under-utilised their power to exclude perpetrators from the home. This is due to limited accommodation options for perpetrators, as well as the poor coordination of the Safe at Home approach in Victoria and the persisting community expectation for victim-survivors to leave.

In order to adequately respond to the needs of those who use social and affordable housing, it is important for the strategy to adopt this contemporary approach and prioritise removing men who use family violence from the family home.

The effects of gender inequality and the gendered expectations placed on women and men is important for setting the context in which both family violence and homelessness occur. By understanding the housing needs of victim-survivors of family violence through the Safe at home approach, working to shift the burden of housing insecurity away from victim-survivors, and improving perpetrator accommodation services, a gender-responsive approach to family violence related homelessness can be developed.

### ***Perpetrator Accommodation and Support Service (PASS) program***

The PASS program is a state-wide 12-month pilot, funded through Family Safety Victoria. Targeted at men who use family violence, PASS is for men who have been excluded from the family home and need short-term accommodation.

There are four main components to the program, including emergency accommodation, brief intervention, wrap around support service and brokerage. In addition to supporting the Safe at Home approach, accommodation services for men who use family violence help keep them in view, reduce the likelihood of them returning to the family home, and place them in a better position to engage with behaviour change interventions. Anecdotal evidence suggests the program is successful in these areas, however, a full external evaluation will also be conducted.

In order to see the continued success of PASS and similar services that support the Safe at Home initiative, we need greater availability and diversity of social and affordable housing for men who use family violence.



### *Diverse communities*

A key element of centring people within the strategy is the inclusion of diverse communities throughout the design and delivery of housing services. This includes First Nations' communities, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals, older Australians and people with disabilities, from the perspective of both victim-survivors and men who use violence. These processes must be culturally safe and involve co-design principles.

Engagement with both victim-survivors of family violence, and men who use family violence, is key to ensuring those with lived experience are considered. However, we recognise the significant barriers to directly engaging with perpetrators. No to Violence is well placed to represent men who use family violence and would welcome any opportunity to provide guidance.

The safety of victim-survivors of family violence is central to any discussion of family violence and should be prioritised through any actions in response. Reforms to social and affordable housing, in the context of family violence, must be driven by the goal to improve the safety of victim-survivors and support their recovery.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Acknowledge the interrelationship between homelessness and family violence and develop a gender-responsive approach.
2. Ensure effective community consultation with diverse communities who face unique housing challenges, as a result of family violence. This includes First Nations' communities, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals, older Australians and people with disabilities, from the perspective of both victim-survivors and men who use violence.

## Question 2: What actions will enable people to access social housing, sustain their tenancies, and move between different housing options as their needs change?

### *Integrated approach to housing*

Due to the interconnected nature of family violence and housing insecurity, effective partnerships across these sectors are essential to ensure positive outcomes for those accessing social and affordable housing. Furthermore, a collaborative multi-agency approach to housing across the provision of all social services presents a significant opportunity to increase transparency and cooperation between sectors and support individuals to receive access to the most appropriate support. As a result, responses to family violence will be strengthened and the safety of victim-survivors of family violence will be improved.

For men who use family violence, the structural drivers of homelessness and poverty create significant challenges for long-term, sustained engagement with social and affordable housing. Housing security is a vital form of social support; however, it is often one of many support services needed by individuals engaged with the family violence response system.

Additionally, many of the social conditions that make it challenging to engage with social housing are also risk factors for perpetrating family violence and may encourage perpetrators to return to the family home.

The key drivers of homelessness and poverty that intersect with family violence risk factors include the limitations of income support payments, limited employment opportunities, use of alcohol and other drugs, and poor mental health (Please refer to [Domestic Violence Victoria's](#) submission to the National Inquiry into Homelessness for more information on how the drivers of homelessness intersect with family violence).

For the housing sector to successfully facilitate men who use family violence to remain in accommodation away from the family home, it must consider these barriers to successful engagement with housing services and their connection to continued perpetration of family violence. An integrated approach to housing, that connects individuals to multiple forms of support, can assist men who use violence to access housing services and sustain their tenancy.

### *Head Leasing*

To support men who use violence to transition to sustainable housing options, it is important to provide pathways to the private rental market.

In recent years, the Victorian Government has delivered the 'Family Violence Head Lease Program' to better support victim-survivors of family violence to transition away from social housing and into the private rental market.

This program involves Government leasing properties and paying full-market rent, and then subletting the property to a victim-survivor of family violence at a discounted rate. Through this program, victim-survivors have been able to utilise the discounted rent to rebuild their finances and prepare for taking over the lease after 12-months. Additionally, head leasing programs provide opportunities to engage with tenants to provide wrap-around support.

The aim of accommodation services for men who use violence is to provide an option for victim-survivors of family to remain in their homes, if it is safe to do so. In cases where men who use family violence are excluded from the family for long periods of time, they require long-term housing options that support them to find private rentals. If these long-term transitional options are not available, men will often return to the home.

Expanding these head leasing initiatives to also include men who use family violence may support perpetrators to remain away from the home and move towards stable housing, and encourage engagement with behaviour change programs. However, head leasing opportunities for perpetrators should not be at the expense of victim-survivors who also rely on these services.

### Recommendations:

3. Establish a collaborative multi-agency approach to homelessness across the housing sector, family violence sector, and other sectors which provide social support.
4. Address the structural barriers to successful engagement with social housing.
5. Expand the use of head leasing program to assist men who use family violence to transition into the private rental market, supporting victim-survivors to remain in their homes when safe to do so.

**Question 3: What are the most important features of affordable housing? (e.g. price, location, security of tenure, access to transport or daily amenities, connection to support services etc.)**

*Appropriate standard of accommodation*

To increase the safety of victim-survivors of family violence, both victim-survivors of family violence and perpetrators require access to social and affordable housing. When creating accommodation services for men who use family violence, the aim is to support victim-survivors to remain in their home, when safe to do so.

To achieve this, perpetrator accommodation services must actively reduce the likelihood of men returning to the family home, while creating opportunities to engage men in MBCPs or other programs to address their abusive behaviour. This can be achieved through case management which can also link men into other necessary services.

This requires social and affordable housing solutions for men who use family violence to be reasonably clean, safe, and secure. Unfortunately, many social housing offerings include boarding houses or 'halfway' housing, which are often not appropriate and result in men returning to the family home.

In addition to this housing being of an appropriate standard, it is also important that men who use family violence are located away from victim-survivors. This shifts the burden of relocation away from victim-survivors and supports them to remain connected to their community and existing support networks.

*Case management and pathways to behaviour change programs*

In addition to keeping men using violence in view and lessening the chances of them returning to the family home, housing programs for perpetrators also place them in a better position to engage with behaviour change programs.

No to Violence's members report that homelessness and housing instability significantly impacts on MBCP drop-out, thus making it a critical element of approaches to addressing family violence.

For men who are using family violence, that are not already engaged with the system, housing programs can also provide a link to behaviour change programs and other support services relating to mental health and alcohol and other drugs, factors which can contribute to family violence.

To support the important role housing plays in supporting behaviour change, perpetrator accommodation services must be mindful to create spaces that challenge male peer relationships which perpetuate a culture of disrespect towards women. This is best achieved by requiring men who participate with perpetrator accommodation services to engage with MBCPs or other forms of behaviour change support.

## Recommendations:

6. Ensure that appropriate social housing and crisis accommodation options are available for men who use family violence.
7. That specialty accommodation services for men who use family violence provide effective pathways to MBCPs and associated case management services.
8. That affordable housing is placed in locations that allow easy access to community services, daily amenities and support services, via public transport.
9. That the Energy Rating standards for affordable housing is strengthened from 6 stars to 8 stars to ensure new buildings have sustainable, climate resilient design that ensure low energy consumption and costs as well as healthy living during climate events.

## Question 4: What actions will support people to find and obtain an affordable home?

### *Increase in perpetrator accommodation programs*

There is a significant need to increase the availability of accommodation services for men who use violence, alongside increases in housing options for victim-survivors of family violence. An increase in housing options for men who use family violence will support the Safe at Home initiative and encourage community attitudes to shift away from the expectation that victim-survivors leave the home.

Currently, the only perpetrator accommodation services in Victoria are Ngarra Jarranounith Place, a medium-term housing service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who are at risk of using family violence, and the Perpetrator Accommodation Support Service (PASS).

It is important to support these existing services, while also encouraging the establishment of further housing services for men who use family violence.

The increased availability of housing services for men who use violence must also be supported by the inclusion of an evaluation framework, to build the evidence around the effectiveness of such programs. In particular, to learn about how perpetrator accommodation services can most effectively support the Safe at Home approach and improve safety for victim-survivors of family violence.

### *Police and perpetrator accommodation referral pathways*

Police are a key stakeholder for successful engagement with housing services for men who use family violence. Currently, referral pathways between police and accommodation services for perpetrators have been underutilised, likely due to limited availability of these housing services and the community expectation for victim-survivors to leave the home. Further work is needed to better understand why police are not utilising referrals to perpetrator accommodation more frequently, so that we can work to overcome any barriers.

By strengthening accommodation services for men who use family violence, we hope to shift the overwhelming burden of housing insecurity away from victim-survivors and enable police to prioritise removing men who use family violence from the home.

## Recommendations:

10. Increase the availability of accommodation services for men who use family violence, to ensure that victim-survivors can remain in the home when appropriate.
11. Build evaluation into perpetrator accommodation services to build the evidence around the effectiveness of such programs in increasing safety for women and children and also for quality improvement.
12. Strengthen referral pathways between police and accommodation services for men who use family violence.

## Question 7: What do we need to do to ensure housing supply meets the needs of people with specific support and housing needs?

### *Diversity of needs*

In addition to an overall increase to the availability of accommodation services for men who use family violence, it is also important to ensure a range of accommodation services are available to meet the needs of our diverse communities.

Existing accommodation service for men who use family violence only provide options for those wishing to access mainstream services or First Nations specific services.

Due to their unique experiences of both homelessness and family violence, tailored housing services must be available for First Nations' men, men from migrant and refugee backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ individuals, older men and men with disabilities who use family violence.

Both homelessness and family violence are experienced within a social and cultural context, meaning that the solutions to these issues must also be socially and culturally specific. Furthermore, accommodation services for both victim-survivors of family violence, and men who use family violence, must be safe. Generalised, mainstream service are not a safe option for all individuals.

### *Longer-term housing options*

In addition to increasing diversity within accommodation services for men who use family violence, there also needs to be options for longer stays. In order to successfully support victim-survivors to remain in their homes, perpetrators require access to short-term, medium-term, and long-term housing, as well as pathways to more sustainable forms of housing outside of the social housing sector.

Without access to medium-term and long-term accommodation options, a bottleneck forms at the completion of a short-term accommodation program due to long waiting lists for social housing. For men who use family violence, the limited availability of pathways to sustainable long-term housing options increases the likelihood of them returning to the family home.

### **Recommendations:**

13. Ensure accommodation services for men who use family violence meet the needs of this diverse group, including services with tailored approaches for First Nations' men, men from migrant and refugee backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ individuals, older men and men with disabilities.
14. Increasing availability of medium-term and long-term accommodation services for men who use family violence.
15. Ensuring that the demand and supply modelling for new affordable housing correctly accounts for the number of victim survivors' already in the refuge system as well as increase demand over time.

## Question 9: How do we strengthen our partnership approach to build a stronger and more effective social and affordable housing system?

### *Real estate and housing sector capacity building*

As previously discussed, the interconnected nature of family violence and housing insecurity requires these sectors to develop effective partnerships.

However, integrating the housing and real estate sector with perpetrator interventions requires the capacity of these sectors to be strengthened, to ensure safe engagement with men who use family violence. This includes adequate training of those within the housing and real estate services in correctly identifying and appropriately responding to family violence, including knowing the warning sign and risk indicator of family violence, believing victims-survivors, not colluding with perpetrators, and know when and how to refer to appropriate services (Please refer to [Domestic Violence Victoria's](#) submission to the Review of Real Estate Education Regulations for more information on key educational standards).

### Recommendations:

16. Build the capacity of the housing and real estate sectors to identify and appropriately respond to family violence through further training and education.



## Question 10: How can we engage with you as we develop new initiatives over the course of this strategy?

Throughout the process of developing and delivering the 10-year strategy for social and affordable housing, it is crucial for Government to engage with those who have lived experience of family violence (this includes both victim-survivors and perpetrators). This involves consultation with the specialist domestic and family violence sector, leaders and leading organisations representing marginalised groups and people with lived expertise prior to developing the Strategy. The safety of victim-survivors of family violence is central to this work, and the approach must be victim-survivor driven.

### *'Experts by Experience'*

The 'Experts by Experience' framework, developed by The University of Melbourne and Domestic Violence Victoria, aims to enhance the ability of specialist family violence services to provide opportunities for survivor-advocates to influence policy development, service planning, and practice. This framework provides a model which can be used to guide the development of the affordable and social housing strategy (more information about the 'Experts by Experience' framework can be found [here](#)).

### *Working with men who use family violence*

Given that men who use violence are a challenging population group to directly engage with, No to Violence is well placed to provide expertise and support in this area. We enthusiastically welcome any opportunity to provide guidance and support for the strategy.

We have experience in gathering the lived experiences of men who violence to build understanding of how they experience the family violence system and improve mechanisms for accountability and victim-survivor safety. An example of this is our recent collaboration with Victorian Legal Aid, in which No to Violence conducted community consultations with men who use family violence (more information about this project can be found [here](#)).

### **Recommendations:**

17. Prioritise engagement with those who have lived experience of family violence and homelessness, ensuring that this approach is victim-survivor driven.