

Submission to the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence September 2024

Background

We are a group of women who live, work and volunteer in the Adelaide hills and surrounds who are united in our belief that women and children should live a life free of domestic violence in all its forms. We volunteer and contribute in many areas across our hills communities including the Country Fire Service, SA Country Women's Association, Meals on Wheels, local government community services including libraries, and many other community groups.

We are deeply concerned at the rate of domestic violence and the unacceptably high number deaths of women and children at the hands of intimate partners or ex partners. We accept that the responses and solutions to this scourge in our communities need to be broad based where cooperative models of service delivery and violence prevention are the key to reducing the rate of violence.

There are several areas of concern for our group but are not limited to:

- Lack of adequate response services for women escaping domestic and family violence (DFV) across the state.
- High demand for shelters resulting in families and women staying in motels as overflow accommodation, the housing crisis generally means no secure housing available for families, creating bottlenecks in a support system that is at capacity.
- Of great concern is the lack of adequate support services and accommodation in country areas where women are in more danger and have little to no options compared to city-based women.
- Women and children generally flee their homes, further increasing trauma and loss for children and increasing homelessness for families. Particularly in current times where homelessness is a significant issue across our community.
- First Nations women are disproportionately at risk and have very few options available.
- Specific CALD supports are inadequate. Culturally appropriate service responses are needed.
- Negative and controlling male behaviours need to be addressed through prevention/education programs. The media has recently reported further stories in our state of abhorrent behaviours by young men at a private school and further acts of violence that seem to continue unabated.
- The impact on children of witnessing or experiencing DFV robs this generation of their childhood and could perpetuate a cycle of violence and abuse.
- The negative online influences for young people and males continue to shape perceptions and values.

Domestic Violence in Rural Areas:

This is of great concern to us.

- DFV is not confined to geographic areas as recent reports have highlighted; however, the need is even more acute for rural and regional women.
- The unique challenges that rural women face, such as isolation, limited access to services, cultural factors, economic dependency, and lack of anonymity.

- There are heightened concerns for women relating to privacy and confidentiality due to living in a small community with a limited number of service providers.
- A lack of specialised or culturally appropriate services (disability, CALD, Indigenous).
- A lack of affordable legal services.
- The higher cost of service provision in non-urban areas.
- Delayed response times (by SAPOL and emergency services) due to geographical remoteness.
- The scarcity of shelters and safe housing options in rural areas is a real issue for women and families in deciding to leave a violent relationship.
- For many women financial dependence, lack of employment opportunities, and transportation issues further exacerbate the problem.
- Geographical isolation and community expectations often prevent women from dealing with their situation.
- Greater advocacy for children is needed and targeted resources for children and young people.
- To change behaviours and support women facing DFV, there is a need for increased training and awareness among law enforcement, healthcare providers, and community leaders in rural areas.

Summary and Recommendations

Our focus as a group in our submission is:

- to improve the DFV services available to regional and rural women and children
- a significant reduction in homelessness and DFV in rural and regional areas through increased funding for rural shelters
- mandatory online training to change behaviours and attitudes, legislation to allow women and families to stay in the family home, more outreach programs, expansion of tele-health options.

We have discussed some initiatives that we believe could support those experiencing DFV in rural and regional areas, as follows:

- Roll out of initiatives for community engagement and education.
- As there are limited accommodation options and services in country areas, we believe that changing behaviours for men of all ages is fundamental to changing outcomes for women and children.
- Negative online influences are having a significant impact on our young men. We are aware that in smaller communities many residents are part of a wide array of interconnected clubs, community groups and other activities. Education through appropriate online training could be very beneficial in country communities where services are limited and the stigma of DFV may prevent women from seeking help.
- We recommend mandatory online training that portrays positive influences on male behaviours for sporting codes and other community groups. By utilising existing sporting clubs and other community groups to deliver this training, this has the potential to connect with both men and women old and young throughout regional/rural smaller communities.
- Establish information hubs, provide a range of information resources for women in facilities that women may access on a regular basis, such as pharmacies, hairdressers, community centres. Discreet information hubs can provide hard copy or online access to services.
- Changes to legislation to support women and children to remain safely in their family home.

- With the increasing widespread problem of shortage of housing across the state for all groups, action is imperative to reduce the rate of homelessness for women and children escaping domestic violence. Children are further traumatised and punished by being taken from their friends, pets, schools and familiar activities.
- Homes need to be made secure and safe for families. The onus should be on the perpetrator to live elsewhere.

Conclusion

We seek improved service delivery and greater access for all women and particularly for our regional and rural families. Greater support for children impacted by DFV and the distribution of resources to inform women. Proactive prevention to break the cycle through education of the community through sporting clubs and other community groups, supported through the introduction of online mandatory training.

We urge the Royal Commission to prioritise the needs of rural women in their recommendations and to implement effective solutions to reduce the impact this scourge has on our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission. We dearly hope that this Royal Commission will be the catalyst for significant change.

Attached is a list of signatories of women who have a strong desire for change.

Regards

Women of the Adelaide Hills

[Redacted signature area]