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Appendix I

The State Of The Sector

Summary report of a review of the
non-government domestic, family,
and sexual violence services sector
in South Australia

JULY 2025

This report was commissioned by the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence and prepared by Good Government Advisory.

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About Good Government Advisory

Good Government Advisory provides expert facilitation and advisory services to government and public sector organisations, supporting effective engagement on complex policy and reform challenges. Our approach is designed to create structured, high-value discussions that help organisations test policy directions, understand implementation risks, and align diverse perspectives.

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land where we work and live. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We also acknowledge the women, allies and organisations who have worked tirelessly for decades to prevent violence and achieve gender equality, and who continue to lead this work today.

This report has been made possible through the generosity of individuals and organisations across the DFSV sector, all of whom participated on the basis of anonymity. Their willingness to share insights, despite the relentless pressures of frontline service delivery, reflects an unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for victim-survivors and strengthening the sector.

Good Government Advisory extends its deep gratitude to these organisations—not just for their time, but for their extraordinary efforts in holding together a sector that is constantly stretched. Throughout the consultation process, providers shared that while they are frequently asked to contribute insights on policy, program design, and workforce challenges, they are never asked about the sustainability of their organisations. Instead, they are expected to navigate increasingly complex funding arrangements, manage compliance-heavy reporting, and absorb the financial risks of short-term contracts- on top of delivering critical, often life-saving services.

The organisations that contributed to this report did so not just to highlight the needs of victim-survivors, but to urge government to engage differently with the sector itself. They called for a shift away from transactional, compliance-driven interactions towards genuine, long-term collaboration- one that recognises not only the work being done, but the structural conditions required to sustain it.

Good Government Advisory thanks these organisations not only for what they shared in this report, but for the work they do every day - often against the odds, often unseen, but always essential.

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INTRODUCTION

This summary draws on *'The State of the Sector,'* a report prepared by Good Government Advisory for the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence. It reflects the views of non-government organisations delivering services across prevention, crisis response, legal support, recovery, and healing.

The full report was not released publicly due to the sensitivity of issues raised, including those related to procurement processes and internal sector dynamics. This summary captures key insights and recurring themes, including direct quotes from interviews with service providers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“The evidence is clear: government is getting in the way of its own ambition.”

The State of the Sector report

The original report described a for-purpose sector held back by excessive compliance, short-term funding cycles, and commissioning models that force services to contort themselves to fit bureaucratic requirements rather than community needs.

“The for-purpose sector is the backbone of South Australia’s response to domestic, family and sexual violence. It brings deep expertise, community trust, and an unmatched ability to adapt to real-world needs.”

The State of the Sector report

Yet the sector operates within a funding system that is crisis-driven, administratively heavy, and designed around government convenience rather than service impact.

Key findings from the report included:

- **Funding structures are fragmented and reactive.** Services juggle multiple short-term contracts with inconsistent timelines, reporting requirements, and constraints. Indexation fails to keep pace with wage increases, Fair Work decisions, or rising operational costs.
- **Compliance obligations are excessive and duplicative.** Providers spend significant time reporting on outputs rather than outcomes, often duplicating the same information across systems with no evidence that the data is reviewed or used.
- **The Alliance model embeds structural disadvantage.** Some organisations reported a perception that strategic decisions are led by the larger organisations within the Alliance structure, with limited influence for smaller and culturally-led services.
- **Engagement with government is often described as fragmented and performative.** Interviewees described being asked repeatedly for advice, with limited evidence that their input has an impact on program design or funding decisions.

“I’ve spoken to five parts of government about workforce and never seen a plan.”

Interview quote

- **The sector’s sustainability is treated as secondary.** The report noted that the health of the organisations delivering DFSV services is as important as the design of the services themselves.

Despite these challenges, the sector shared examples of innovation, collaboration, and service quality that continue despite structural barriers.

“We’ve shown what’s possible. But we need government to stop designing around itself.”

Interview quote

1. THE ALLIANCE MODEL AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The alliance model introduced in South Australia in July 2021 aimed to enhance coordination, reduce duplication, and support more integrated service delivery across homelessness and domestic and family violence systems. It was intended to strengthen collaboration, enable shared planning, and foster better outcomes through collective decision-making.

However, feedback from service providers suggests that the model has not delivered on these goals in the context of DFSV. Instead of enhancing coordination, many described a system that reinforces administrative burden, diverts attention from recovery-focused work, and replicates power imbalances already present in the broader system.

“It’s a homelessness model with a DFSV label slapped on.”

Interview quote

The report identified several areas where the model is misaligned with the needs of DFSV service delivery:

- **A housing lens dominates the approach.** Providers noted that while housing is a critical part of the response to violence, the model overly prioritises accommodation-based responses at the expense of long-term recovery, therapeutic support, and healing.
- **Data systems are not fit for purpose.** The Homeless2Home (H2H) system was widely seen as incompatible with DFSV service delivery. Providers noted that it does not accommodate critical elements such as safety planning, legal responses, or trauma-informed care.
- **Cultural safety and community-led models are not embedded.** Culturally led organisations reported that the model does not create space for culturally specific service design, family-led recovery, or holistic safety planning grounded in culture and community.
- **Governance arrangements do not support shared leadership.** Several smaller and specialist providers reported their experiences of strategic decisions being led by larger organisations. While collaboration is encouraged in principle, services reported a perception that influence over decisions and funding is not evenly shared.

- **Funding is short-term and inflexible.** Many providers described challenges in retaining staff and planning services due to short contract terms and a lack of investment in long-term service continuity.
- **Workforce development lacks coordination.** There is no overarching strategy to support DFSV workforce capability. Most training, supervision and support is delivered in-house, without dedicated resourcing or sector-wide standards.

The report concluded that the alliance model, as currently structured, does not reflect core principles of DFSV service delivery – particularly trauma-informed care, gender equity, cultural safety, and lived experience leadership. There is strong stakeholder support for moving toward a model that better reflects these values and the unique features of DFSV work.

2. ENGAGEMENT WITHOUT IMPACT

The report identified a consistent theme: while the sector is regularly asked to contribute advice to government, that engagement often lacks structure, coordination, or follow-through.

“We provide free advice across government, but that expertise sits at the top of our sector, while most of our staff are operational. We don’t have the luxury of endless policy conversations without action.”

Interview quote

Organisations described the relationship as extractive. Despite being under-resourced, services are expected to provide input across justice, health, child protection, education, and social policy, without remuneration, feedback loops, or visibility of impact. This was particularly true for smaller and specialist organisations that do not have dedicated policy staff.

The report identified several patterns in government engagement:

- **Expertise is routinely accessed without funding.** Providers are expected to contribute to policy design, strategic planning, and service reform without a contract or remuneration. The burden of unfunded expertise was a particular concern for organisations with small teams or high caseloads.
- **Engagement is fragmented and duplicative.** The lack of internal coordination across government agencies means services are asked to provide the same information multiple times to different areas of government.

“I’ve been asked to talk to five separate areas of the state government about my advice on the community sector workforce, skills and training needs in the last two years. I have seen no program, product, policy or report from all that time I spent providing that advice.”

Interview quote

- **Policy advice disappears into a ‘black hole’.** Services reported submitting recommendations or insights through formal processes but seeing no evidence of

follow-up, feedback or implementation. Some noted that detailed submissions and reporting documents are not read by contract managers or policy staff.

- **Performative engagement without structural change.** The report concluded that consultation frequently lacks a structured mechanism for translating insights into action. Engagement occurs, but system settings remain unchanged.

“We provide detailed reports and recommendations, but they disappear into a black hole. Nothing changes.”

Interview quote

Providers were clear that engagement is not the issue. The challenge is that engagement often lacks depth, continuity, or meaningful impact.

3. THE POLITICS OF FUNDING

The report found that funding for domestic, family and sexual violence services remains dominated by short-term, compliance-heavy contracts. While some Commonwealth funding arrangements were viewed more favourably, services consistently reported that benefits were often lost once passed through state systems.

“The state government locks us into service units that don’t align with how we actually work. The Commonwealth gives us more freedom, but once that funding is passed through the state, it becomes tied to unnecessary KPIs that restrict service delivery.”

Interview quote

Organisations reported that funding structures fail to reflect the real cost of service delivery, with particular concerns around indexation, wage increases, and industrial entitlements.

“With need-based funding, we can put the money where it’s needed—whether that’s intensive case management, safety planning, or support for children. We’re not stuck choosing between funding streams that don’t match real-world needs.”

Interview quote

The report identified several systemic challenges:

- **Short-term contracts limit strategic planning.** Many state-funded programs operate on 12-month agreements, often renewed late or with verbal confirmation only. Services described a constant level of uncertainty, which affects staff retention, service continuity, and organisational sustainability.

“We’ve had 11 one-year extensions for one program. It’s unsustainable for staffing. We train staff to work with kids, and they leave because they know they won’t have a job.”

Interview quote

- **Funding decisions reinforce crisis responses.** Prevention and recovery services remain underfunded, while crisis accommodation and policing-based interventions continue to dominate. The report noted that this mirrors political and media cycles.

“We are funded for outputs, not outcomes. We can report how many people we’ve seen, but not whether they’re safer six months later.”

Interview quote

“We could prevent the next generation of women from experiencing violence. But prevention doesn’t make headlines. Crisis does.”

Interview quote

- Services **absorb cost pressures.** Wage increases, inflation, WHS requirements, and on-call costs are not routinely reflected in contract adjustments. Organisations are expected to absorb these costs within fixed funding envelopes.

“The government keeps funding the same programs without updating the unit cost. We’re covering award increases and rising rent from the same budget we had four years ago.”

Interview quote

- **Complexity increases without support.** Services managing multiple contracts reported navigating different reporting frameworks, deliverables, and timelines, each requiring staff time and administrative overhead without additional funding.

The report concluded that government funding structures—particularly at the state level—do not support long-term, sustainable service delivery. Instead, they reinforce reactivity, competition, and administrative burden.

4. REPORTING AND COMPLIANCE

Compliance and reporting emerged as the single biggest issue raised by DFSV organisations, with uniform views across the sector. Service providers consistently described the administrative burden as overwhelming, diverting resources from direct service provision.

“We could deliver more work without further government investment, if only someone tackled the outrageous amount of pointless reporting.”

Interview quote

In addition to the scale of reporting, services expressed deep frustration that compliance appears disconnected from outcomes, policy decisions, or funding adjustments. Despite the vast amount of time spent meeting obligations—often accounting for 30 to 40 per cent of staff time—there is little evidence that government agencies read or utilise the reports.

The report highlighted the following concerns:

- **Duplicate reporting across multiple systems.** Providers described being asked to submit the same information in different formats to different funders. One organisation reported managing 59 separate agreements, each with its own reporting system.
- **Volume-based metrics prioritised over outcomes.** Services are required to report on appointments, referrals or attendance, even where these indicators do not reflect changes in safety, wellbeing, or recovery.
- **Reporting formats vary widely.** Inconsistent templates, timelines and data expectations create inefficiency and duplication, particularly for organisations managing contracts across both state and Commonwealth programs.
- **Reporting is rarely used for improvement.** Providers described submitting detailed reports with no feedback, follow-up, or sign of uptake.

“We spend more time justifying underspends than we do delivering services. If we could redirect compliance hours into frontline work, we’d serve more clients without additional funding.”

Interview quote

- **Compliance frameworks do not reflect risk.** Smaller and regional organisations reported facing the same reporting burden as large, city-based providers despite vastly different scales, funding, and staffing capacity.

Some services questioned the purpose of the reporting altogether.

“I put swear words in three reports in a row to see if anyone reads them. Nobody ever noticed.”

Interview quote

“Three people who have managed our program in the ... Government admitted they have never read one. We kill ourselves to write them.”

Interview quote

The report concluded that current reporting requirements incur significant costs without corresponding public benefits and called for a system-wide shift toward streamlined, outcome-focused, and risk-proportionate compliance.

5. WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY AND RISK

The report identified significant pressure across the DFSV workforce, with services describing high caseloads, burnout, and increasing difficulty attracting and retaining staff. While some organisations reported stable teams, others described constant churn and difficulty filling vacancies, particularly in crisis and regional roles.

“We are never fully staffed, particularly in high-intensity roles like the Domestic Violence Crisis Line.”

Interview quote

Key challenges included:

- **Burnout and vicarious trauma.** Services acknowledged the emotional intensity of the work, but noted that burnout is often driven by workload, funding uncertainty and a lack of structured support.
- **Short-term contracts destabilise teams.** Organisations reported losing skilled workers due to rolling 12-month contracts and late funding renewals.

“We never find out if our funding is being redone before it runs out. We sometimes get something verbal. Then we don’t get a contract until post.”

Interview quote

- **Government poaching and sector competition.** State agencies, particularly in child protection and housing, were described as recruiting directly from DFSV providers, offering higher salaries and more secure conditions. The NDIS and mental health sectors were also identified as sources of attrition.

“People are always stealing my staff. They get burned out and then move into child, youth, housing parts of our organisation.”

Interview quote

- **Training pathways are not fit for purpose.** Formal training options, particularly through TAFE and generalist university programs, were described as misaligned with

the realities of DFSV work. Many organisations reported building internal capability through their own induction and training models.

“TAFE is not built for this work, so we have no choice but to train our own workforce. We can’t wait for the system to catch up.”

Interview quote

- **Social work registration may restrict access.** Organisations expressed concern that upcoming regulatory changes may exclude experienced, culturally competent staff who lack formal qualifications.

Workforce challenges were not limited to recruitment. The report found that many organisations were funding training, supervision, and wellbeing supports from their own operational budgets without dedicated funding or a sector-wide strategy.

6. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

While board governance was seen as strong across most organisations, the report identified growing concerns around operational leadership, succession planning, and mid-tier capability.

Boards were described as critical to managing risk and ensuring compliance.

“Our board is really strong – they cover areas of expertise that our operational staff don’t always have, like financial and legal risk. They take care of the governance so we can focus on service delivery.”

Interview quote

However, at the operational level, services reported vulnerabilities:

- **Succession planning is lacking.** Many organisations described senior leadership teams with decades of experience but no clear pipeline of emerging leaders to take their place.

“Our sector leaders are ageing out, and there’s no pipeline for new leadership. In ten years, we’re looking at a massive exodus.”

Interview quote

- **Mid-tier capability is underdeveloped.** The absence of dedicated funding for 2IC or mid-level leadership roles was seen as a structural barrier to long-term workforce resilience.
- **Governance transitions require tailored support.** Some organisations noted that while they are delivering culturally safe and community-led services, the systems supporting governance transitions often assume a one-size-fits-all model that may not reflect how services are actually structured or led.

The report recommended that policy settings allow for flexibility in how organisations are governed – recognising that diverse service models may need different forms of leadership development and governance support over time.

7. REFORM IS POSSIBLE

Despite the challenges outlined in the report, providers consistently expressed a commitment to reform and a belief that better partnership with the government is achievable. Many organisations shared examples of collaboration, innovation and adaptability, often delivered despite system settings rather than because of them.

- **Locally driven partnerships are working.** Informal, multi-agency networks—particularly those built at the regional level—were seen as more effective than centrally managed structures. These partnerships were described as responsive, trusted, and better aligned with community needs.
- **Philanthropic funding enables innovation.** Services reported that philanthropic funders provide more flexibility, lower compliance burdens, and greater capacity for risk-taking and evidence-building. Several programs that began with philanthropic support have since secured government investment.

“We could never have done this under a government contract. It would have been too risky. But philanthropy backed us, and now we have the data to prove it works.”

Interview quote

- **The sector continues to deliver, despite the system.** Providers reported high levels of internal collaboration, mutual support, and a commitment to ensuring clients are never turned away, even when referrals fall outside contract scope or service mandate.

“We lose time we can’t report on or aren’t funded for, just making sure people get to the right place. But we do it, because it’s the only way to make sure people get the support they need.”

Interview quote

The report concluded that meaningful change is not only necessary but possible if the government is prepared to shift from transactional, compliance-driven relationships toward genuine partnerships with the sector.



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