



21 August 2024

## **Submission to South Australia's Royal Commission into Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence**

### Introduction

Centacare Catholic Country SA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Royal Commission into domestic, family, and sexual violence. Our submission outlines the unique challenges and opportunities associated with delivering essential services in regional, rural and remote areas, particularly in regions such as Ceduna and the Far West Coast of South Australia. As the sole provider of critical domestic violence services in this area, we are uniquely positioned to offer insights into the barriers and potential solutions for improving support and outcomes for individuals and families affected by domestic, family, and sexual violence and who are distant from larger service centres.

### Key Areas of Concern and Focus

#### 1. Geographical Remoteness and Service Delivery

- Challenges:

The geographical isolation of our service areas presents significant challenges in providing consistent and effective support. The Ceduna office services domestic violence clients in areas such as Wudinna, Poochera, and Minnipa, which require round trips of up to five hours. We also service areas as far as the Western Australia border, a five-hour drive from Ceduna. These distances strain our resources and limit our ability to promptly reach all individuals in need. As the sole service provider for a significant area, we face scarce resources and have no referral options, meaning we must cover all support needs, from pre- to post-service.

Remoteness also means we do not have options to refer clients to other specialised services. This reality compels us to service creep beyond our funding scope to address every aspect of support that is required. This ranges from initial crisis intervention and ongoing case management to post-service follow-up and long-term recovery. Our team is responsible for managing the full continuum of care, which includes prevention, immediate response, and sustained support, often with limited staffing, funding, and logistical resources. This comprehensive approach, while essential, places immense pressure on our organisation to meet the diverse and complex needs of those we serve.

- Opportunities:

Leveraging technology for remote counselling and support services can help bridge the distance gap. Investing in mobile service units that can travel to various remote locations would also enhance our outreach capabilities.



The establishment of an expert panel to develop nationally consistent risk assessment processes that are sensitive to patterns of behaviour over time is important. This includes addressing precursors and risk factors for severe and fatal violence, such as coercive control, sexual violence, and non-fatal strangulation. These risk assessment processes should be implemented across systems, including police and courts.

Critical systemic opportunities to prevent and disrupt violence by high-risk perpetrators, including consideration of bail laws and their application; protective orders and penalties for breaches; electronic monitoring of high-risk offenders; information sharing across systems and jurisdictions; and nationally congruent domestic violence disclosure schemes.

## 2. Recruitment and Retention of Staff

### ○ Challenges:

Recruitment in remote areas is hindered by limited skilled and trained staff, limited accommodation options and high living costs. These factors also deter potential staff from relocating, exacerbating our staffing shortages.

### ○ Opportunities:

Government incentives for housing and living allowances for staff working in remote areas could help alleviate these issues. We have already raised the dire housing shortages in regional areas with the Treasurer. One option could be to support NGO providers of government services to access the same housing options as SA Government workers, e.g. housing available to teachers, nurses etc. Arguably, NGO workers delivering government funded services are just one step removed from those directly employed within the SA Public Service. In some cases, there are programs that are delivered by both NGOs and government departments. Partnerships with local communities to develop affordable housing projects would also support staff attraction and retention.

The development of a National Workforce Strategy could drive action in key areas, such as forming partnerships with tertiary institutions to increase the number of graduates with specialist skills in domestic, family, and sexual violence. Additionally, creating alternative pathways and flexible requirements to reduce barriers for Aboriginal workers and individuals with lived experience, as well as providing incentives to support attraction and retention in regional and remote areas, is essential.

## 3. Funding Constraints

### ○ Challenges:

Funding does not keep pace with CPI. Costs for rural and remote services are generally 50% higher in these areas. We had to reduce services by 1.0FTE this last year, because of the funding issue. Agencies like ours are dependent on ad-hoc funding to cover shortfalls, and/or subsidisation from internal resources, which is unsustainable.

### ○ Opportunities:



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Structural funding adjustment and coordination between National and State governments is required. This could potentially lead to the much-needed increased funding, specifically allocated for regional and remote service delivery. This funding should account for the higher costs of travel, staffing, and maintaining service infrastructure in isolated locations. It should also account for the full continuum of DFV support from prevention; crisis intervention; recovery and post-trauma healing.

#### 4. Early Intervention and Education

- Challenges:

There is a lack of early intervention programs and educational initiatives targeting families and schools. Preventative measures are essential to address the root causes of domestic violence and reduce its prevalence.

There are few educative supports such as anger management; restorative practice; trauma recovery; coercive control education and the development of healthy relationships, for perpetrators on remand. Considering the (often) extensive time between remand and sentencing, this is an opportunity lost.

There is also a lack of service delivery of perpetrator programs when these are mandated via Court, and then post-release.

We are especially concerned at Intervention Orders and Bail conditions that place victim-survivors at further risk due to the proximity of perpetrators and victim-survivors in small rural communities.

- Opportunities:

There is a requirement for more mandates for perpetrators through the courts to attend DFSV Education, parenting education programs, drug, and alcohol counselling etc. This should include accountability consequences if they do not attend. Again, structural funding adjustment is a prerequisite, and such programs need to be developed and based on best-practice evidence.

Integrating domestic violence education into school curriculum and family programs would foster a culture of awareness and prevention. Early intervention initiatives should be prioritised and adequately funded to enable proactive support rather than reactive crisis management.

Developing and implementing comprehensive behaviour change programs that consider cultural contexts and individual circumstances is essential. Establishing a men's accommodation shelter or bail house would provide a safe space for men exiting the justice system to engage in healthy relationship programs and rehabilitation.

Practical Frustrations and Considerations – especially in our country communities:

- Challenges:

We frequently see victims-survivors paying rent for tenancies that they cannot live in due to safety risks. However, when they are not living there, they are not seen as being at risk, although they are seen as breaching tenancy terms. This disadvantages clients (victim blaming) and creates pressures for clients to return to unsafe tenancies so that they and their children do not become homeless.



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There is a lack of panel providers in region for emergency accommodation. For example, Ceduna, does not have a single motel willing to accommodate.

SAHA (now SAHT) maintenance process prolongs victim-survivors finding safe accommodation. No expediency for DFSV Victims.

We are often unable to move victim survivors from emergency/supportive accommodation creating congestion restricting service support to high-risk clients.

Although technology may assist, we also face a significant digital divide in rural and remote areas, where both access and affordability is a barrier to effective use of technology. Face to face supports, especially in regionally remote and Aboriginal Communities are essential.

### Conclusion

Locally, we welcome the Royal Commission in SA. Our thoughts are that DFSV should have its own portfolio in Government. It needs to be separated from the Homelessness Portfolio. They are separate issues and DFSV gets lost in the homelessness lens through which it is considered, because of the structure of government.

Centacare Catholic Country SA is committed to enhancing the support available to individuals and families affected by domestic, family, and sexual violence in regional, rural and remot areas. Addressing the challenges of geographical remoteness, recruitment barriers, and funding constraints requires targeted solutions and increased investment. Emphasising early intervention, education, and culturally appropriate programs will pave the way for a more effective and sustainable response to domestic violence in our communities.

We urge the Royal Commission to consider these unique challenges and opportunities in its recommendations, ensuring that the needs of regional and remote areas are met with adequate resources and support.

Yours sincerely

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