

Determining current housing demands resulting from COVID19 for women leaving violence

Domestic and family violence (DFV) increased in complexity during the COVID-19 pandemic. This created new pathways for women to escape DFV, as governments responded by injecting ad-hoc funding into temporary housing options and homelessness services. This research focused on an integrated approach including policy analysis and empirical data, demonstrating that existing policies are often limited in scope and out of touch with the DFV survivors' long-term housing and support needs.

Why the study:

- During COVID-19, police reports showed a 10-16% increase in incidents of domestic violence-related behaviour in every state in Australia.
- Research on the government responses and changes to DFV accommodation in NSW since the outbreak of COVID-19 and the access to temporary and long-term housing for women was scarce.
- The rate of homelessness due to DFV was steadily increasing, with the overall rate of female clients increasing from 124.4 clients per 10,000 population in 2011–12 to 136.6 in 2019–20 (AIHW 2020b). DFV is the leading cause of homelessness for women in Australia (AIHW 2018).

What we did:

- We interviewed DFV service providers who have witnessed changes to policy and service provision in Australia before and during lockdown periods from 2020 until 2022.
- We engaged in an in-depth reflexive policy analysis of pre- and post-pandemic housing-related federal and NSW policies and programmes looking at the framing behind Government responses to housing provision and access for women leaving DFV during COVID-19.

What we found:

- Housing responses driven by COVID-19 focused primarily on homelessness, stressing further its link to DFV.
- Programmes such as Together Home, targeting rough sleepers, provided women leaving DFV with an opportunity to access the private rental market. However, despite the effectiveness of this programme, women need to be homeless to access this support.
- Lack of inter-agency collaboration was highlighted as one of the hindering factors in finding housing for DFV survivors.
- There is a sense that policymakers continue to view DFV as a crisis rather than a process of transitioning to a new and safe life with a stable home as its core.

What this means:

- A more holistic approach with DFV-targeted housing responses and more effective policies is needed to help women leaving DFV.
- Consistent investment in social and affordable housing is needed; once-off economic recovery packages are not enough.

