

Family Violence and Homelessness Practice Exchange

NIFVS Forum Summary

On Tuesday 12 July 2016, 87 workers from the family violence and housing/homelessness sectors came together to share expertise, unpack myths and assumptions and better understand the unique challenges and opportunities of working in each sector. Participants heard presentations about the sectors' shared challenges and ongoing reform processes.

Shared experiences

Roles

Homelessness services help clients to find and maintain stable long-term housing and address the issues that have contributed to homelessness.

Family violence services aim to address risk posed by family violence and promote women's and children's safety.

Demand

In September 2015 2,811 households (3,503 people) were awaiting assistance from homelessness services in the northern region. **Three hundred new households** present to homelessness access points, each month.

Berry Street, the family violence intake service for women, can receive up to **1,300 referrals** in any given month.

Shared clients

30% of people identify **family violence as the primary reason** they are accessing a homelessness service.

Many women accessing family violence services are **homeless or at risk of homelessness**.

Reforming the sectors

Both the family violence and housing and homelessness sectors are currently undergoing major reforms to better respond to the challenges they are facing.

Housing and Homelessness reform

- The reforms will see a combined public housing and community housing waiting list, choice-based letting and a streamlined approach to private rental access.
- One of the 'launch sites' is in Hume Moreland, providing us an opportunity to highlight need and think about new approaches.



Family Violence Royal Commission

- There will be a 'blitz' to rehouse women and children forced to leave their homes following violence.
- Broader housing related reforms will be led by an implementation taskforce, including the expansion of flexible support packages and increased private rental support.



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Participants heard from a panel of practitioners from safe steps Family Violence Response Centre, Launch Housing, Berry Street Northern Family and Domestic Violence Service and WISHIN about the challenges for workers from family violence and housing/homelessness sectors. The practitioners responded to a hypothetical scenario involving a client named Michelle. In the scenario, Michelle contacts safe steps to seek assistance for family violence.

A **safe steps** intake worker would conduct a comprehensive risk assessment. They would be seeking to understand the immediate reason for Michelle's call and what had happened to her in the previous week.

Given her circumstance, Michelle would be assessed as high risk and offered temporary motel accommodation. If Michelle declines the accommodation, she might be offered a referral to a homelessness service.

Launch Housing would conduct a risk assessment and may have similar options to offer - such as motel. Having identified family violence as the reason for Michelle's inability to return home, Launch may seek a consult with Berry Street or WISHIN to see what other options might be available in the region.

Berry Street could provide an ongoing assessment of risk and support to access legal redress - including a Family Violence Intervention Order. As a service offering longer-term support to women in Hume-Moreland, **WISHIN** may end up working with Michelle to address her longer-term recovery from family violence and her wellbeing needs.

Ultimately, as Michelle disclosed to Berry Street that her children are Aboriginal, the services identify that she is able to be temporarily housed by Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service.

The safe steps worker might feel hopeless and afraid for Michelle's safety. The worker would have spent a day responding to similar high risk

The Launch Housing worker may have numerous others in the waiting room at the time that Michelle arrives and only have 45 minutes to conduct their assessment.

As Berry Street and WISHIN do not have crisis accommodation attached to their service, they would not be able to provide accommodation to Michelle and her children for the night.

Practice exchange: better understanding each others' sectors

Participants had an opportunity to discuss myths and assumptions about each others' sectors and how they could work better together to minimise the barriers for women and children.

Myths and assumptions

Myth: other agencies are not as stretched as mine, or have more resources.

Reality: all agencies are working with time pressures and limited resources.

Myth: there are plenty of places in refuge for women who want them.

Reality: refuges are full to capacity on most nights.

Minimising the barriers

Consult other services about their role and what resources they are able to offer before making referrals.

Provide **comprehensive referrals** to minimise the need for women to retell their stories.

Develop **strong relationships** with other sectors and services to ensure smooth referral pathways.