

NSW Pre-Budget Submission 2022/23.

**Improving access to sexual violence
services**



**We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout
Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and
community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to
Elders past, present and emerging.**

Summary

The NSW Sexual Violence Helpline (formerly NSW Rape Crisis) is the state-wide 24/7 specialist counselling and care navigation service for people in NSW impacted by sexual violence. The service is delivered by Full Stop Australia (formerly Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia), a world-leading trauma and violence specialist organisation putting a full stop to sexual, domestic and family violence through the provision of support, education, and advocacy services.

The NSW Government has been funding the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline for nearly 50 years. Current funding is \$1,522,600 per annum. The existing contract runs until 30 June 2023.

This funding submission includes recommendations for the expansion of the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline to meet rising demand and to improve accessibility for at-risk cohorts. Overall, we recommend that the NSW Government invest an additional:

- \$923,701 in additional core funding over the next 4 years to the 24/7 state-wide Sexual Violence Helpline to cover operational costs and meet unmet need; and
- \$467,679 as one-off funding for 12 months to improve access to sexual violence services for priority populations.

Last year (2020/21), the 24/7 NSW Sexual Violence Helpline received 14,089 calls and online contacts from people of all ages, genders and diverse backgrounds in NSW impacted by sexual violence, and yet **at current funding levels, one in every three calls (29%) were unable to be answered.**

Service demand continues to rise in line with reported sexual assault crime rates showing a **21% year-on-year increase in reported sexual assaults to June 2021.** (BOCSAR 2021)

Against this rising demand, the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline has not been funded for operational costs beyond counsellor wages, having to rely upon community donations to operate 24/7. Moreover, with this funding shortfall, the organisation has not had the capacity to invest in accessibility measures for priority at-risk cohorts, including children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, LGBTIQ+ people, and people with disability. Each of these priority cohorts remain underrepresented a clients of the state-wide Sexual Violence Helpline.


Full Stop Australia recommends the NSW Government invest an additional \$923,701 per annum to ensure 24/7 service coverage for our state-wide Sexual Violence Helpline to meet current client demand, and a further \$467,679 in one-off funding for the 2022/23 year to support the

employment of five (5) Community Engagement Officers for each of these at-risk groups to improve access to essential sexual violence services for priority populations in NSW.

Everyone in NSW impacted by sexual violence deserves to be supported in their safety and recovery.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspect of this submission in further detail. For more information, please contact our myself at ceo@fullstop.org.au or on 0477 442 122.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hayley Foster".

Hayley Foster
Chief Executive Officer
Full Stop Australia

Prevalence and impacts of sexual, domestic and family violence

Sexual violence is a major national health and welfare issue. It affects people of all ages, ethnicities and genders, but predominantly affects women and children.

One in five Australian women (18% or 3.3 million) have experienced sexual assault since age of 15 (ABS 2017). One in six girls and one in ten boys experience abuse before age of 15. Girls between the ages for 15-19 and boys between the ages of 10-15 are at the highest risk of sexual assault.

Sexual violence is most often perpetrated in the home, but can also be perpetrated in a range of educational, workplace, community and service settings. For example, one in three Australian workers have experienced sexual harassment in that setting. (Jenkins 2020)

The impacts of sexual violence are far-reaching for the individual and the community. They are pervasive and can impact on the individual's ability to navigate daily living.

Impacts for individuals include:

- Relationship and family breakdown
- Financial and housing insecurity,
- Impacts on mental health,
- Physical injuries,
- Poor health outcomes.

Trauma and complex trauma impacts related to sexual violence include, but are not limited to:

- Development of mental health issues,
- Substance misuse,
- Disrupted education, social and economic engagement.

For children, the impacts of being exposed sexual violence are magnified. Some common trauma impacts include:

- Development of mental health issues,
- Sleep disturbances,
- Learning difficulties,
- Behavioural and relational problems.

There is also evidence that experiencing sexual violence as a child makes that child more vulnerable to other forms of child abuse and neglect, including being abused further and/or using problematic and sexually harmful behaviours against other children.

More broadly, sexual violence places greater strain on families, workplaces, and social, health and justice service systems. Intimate partner violence is estimated to cost the Australian economy over \$22 billion each year (KPMG, 2016).

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

Recommendation 1: Increase core funding to the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline by \$923,701 per annum to cover operational costs and meet rising unmet need

People impacted by sexual violence need specialist support to manage and recover from the impacts of the trauma they have experienced. This can range from a crisis response, to trauma specialist counselling, care navigation and warm referrals, and ad-hoc debriefing. Family, friends and colleagues also need specialist advice and support to in turn support their loved ones. Acknowledging this, the NSW Government currently provides \$1,522,600 per annum to operate the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline in a contract to 30 June 2023.

This service has been in operation for close to 50 years, providing 24/7 trauma specialist support to people of all ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds impacted by sexual violence in NSW. Demand for sexual assault services has continued to grow throughout this time yet there has not been a corresponding increase in funding to meet this increasing client need. Indeed, **the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline has not received a substantial increase in funding for over 35 years.**

Last year (2020/21), the 24/7 NSW Sexual Violence Helpline received 14,089 calls and online contacts from people of all ages, genders and diverse backgrounds in NSW impacted by sexual violence, and yet **at current funding levels, one in every 3 calls (29%) were unable to be answered.**

Against this unmet demand, it is noted that currently, **NSW Government funding for the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline does not cover operational costs beyond counsellor wages.** All other operational costs have to be met by community donations.

The other way Full Stop Australia has been able to continue operating the service 24/7 is by obtaining other government and corporate contracts for service (including the Commonwealth Department of Social Services Redress Support Service, South Australia Health Yarrow Place Sexual Assault Service, and the Insurance Australia Group (IAG) National Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline) so as to take advantage of economies of scale. **None of these other contracts are secure beyond 30 June 2022.**

The current cost of operating the 24/7 helpline is \$3,313,928 per annum. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the calls and online contacts received are for the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline.

Thus, the proportional cost to operate the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline is \$2,470,201 per annum.

This leaves a **funding shortfall of \$923,701 per annum:**

Funding received :	\$1,522,600
Cost to operate NSW Sexual Violence Helpline	<u>\$2,470,201</u>
Funding shortfall:	\$923,701

Further compounding this funding shortfall, demand for sexual violence counselling continues to increase in line with record rates of reported sexual assault.

In fact, sexual assault is the fastest growing crime being reported in NSW. It was the only major offence to show a significant upward trend in the 24 months to June 2021. Specifically, recorded incidents of sexual assault rose 21% year-on-year to June 2021. (BOCSAR 2021)

In 2022/23, Full Stop Australia anticipates a further 10-15% increase in client demand for sexual violence counselling and support in response to increasing community awareness, including from the NSW Government's public sexual consent awareness campaign, **Make No Doubt**. We are hopeful the NSW Government will provide the necessary support to the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline to ensure we are there to support people impacted by sexual violence when they need us most.

Recommendation 2: Provide one-off funding of \$467,679 to the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline to increase accessibility to at-risk priority populations

As an underfunded essential service, Full Stop Australia has not had the capacity to invest in targeted measures to increase the accessibility of the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline for priority at-risk cohorts.

Whilst women remain the highest represented as victim-survivors of sexual violence, with 1 in 5 women experiencing sexual assault (ABS PSS 2016), **certain population groups are at additional risk of experiencing sexual violence** whilst at the same time facing significant barriers to accessing essential services for their safety and recovery.

- Children under the age of 15 years represent more than 40% of reported sexual assault victims in NSW, (BOCSAR 2021) and children and young people aged 15-19 years are the highest risk cohort for experiencing sexual assault, Australia-wide. (ABS PSS 2016)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are estimated to be at least three times more likely to experience sexual assault than non-Indigenous women. (VicHealth 2011)
- Women with disability are twice as likely to experience sexual violence when compared to women without disability, (Brain Injury Australia et al. 2015) and 90% of women with intellectual disability have experienced sexual abuse. (ALRC 2010)
- Migrant and refugee women are also more likely to be subjected to sexual violence when compared to Australian-born women. (Segrave, Wickes, and Keel 2021)
- People from the LGBTIQ+ community are estimated to experience sexual violence at similar rates to women, (Campo and Tayton 2015) and transgender women are estimated to experience violence at four times the rate of cis-gendered women. (Flores et al. 2021)

Each of these at-risk priority cohorts experience substantial barriers to service access and are currently underrepresented as clients of the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline.

In order to address this, Full Stop Australia recommends the NSW Government provide an additional \$467,679 in one-off funding for the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline in 2022/23 to support the employment of five (5) Community Engagement Officers for each of these at-risk groups statewide.

These community Community Engagement Officers would be qualified counsellors, social workers and psychologist working with key relevant service agencies to develop robust interagency referral pathways and integrated models of specialised care for each priority at-risk cohort and their families and caregivers (children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrant

and refugee women, people with disability and LGBTIQ+ people). More specifically, these Community Engagement Officers would:

- Develop warm referral pathways between key government and non-government service partners such as the health services, including local NSW Health Sexual Assault Services, mental health services, alcohol and other drug services, maternal health, child protection, justice services, education services, industry bodies, community organisations, and population-specific services, such as youth services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Migrant and Refugee services, disability services, and LGBTIQ+ health services.
- Work in partnership with key government and non-government mental and allied health services to provide specialist trauma counselling to complement work currently underway including therapeutic plans and community care networks, and to support clients currently waitlisted or not eligible for specialist counselling services.
- Work in partnership with key government and non-government mental and allied health services to develop a brief intervention model for families and caregivers supporting a loved one impacted by sexual violence. This would include psycho-education, support/counselling, debriefing, and warm referral for practical supports.

With this one-off investment, Full Stop Australia anticipates a sustained threefold increase in the number of clients supported by the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline across each priority cohort.

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