

Consultation on draft NSW Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035.

Full Stop Australia Submission

Full Stop Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Government's new ten-year NSW Homelessness Strategy 2025-35 (**Strategy**).

We have not responded to every aspect of the Strategy. Instead, we have drawn on our expertise as the provider of the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline, a 24/7 trauma-specialist counselling and crisis management service for victim-survivors of sexual violence in NSW, for which we are grateful to be funded by the NSW Government. In line with our organisational expertise, we have focused our submission on ensuring the Strategy responds to the needs of victim-survivors of sexual violence.

In addition to the points below, we have also had the opportunity to view an advance copy of DVNSW's submission on the Strategy and we endorse that submission.

About Full Stop Australia

Full Stop Australia is a nationally focused not-for-profit organisation which has been working in the field of sexual, domestic, and family violence since 1971. We started as Sydney Rape Crisis—the first service in Australia dedicated to providing support to survivors of sexual violence. Today, we perform the following functions:

- Provide expert and confidential telephone, online and face-to-face counselling to people of all genders who have experienced sexual, domestic, or family violence, and specialist help for their supporters and those experiencing vicarious trauma.
- Conduct best practice training and professional services to support frontline workers, government, and the corporate and not-for-profit sectors.
- Advocate for laws and systems better equipped to respond to, and ultimately prevent, sexual, domestic and family violence.

Our advocacy is guided by the lived expertise of over 730 survivor-advocates in our [National Survivor Advocate Program \(NSAP\)](#). The NSAP gives victim-survivors of gender-based violence a platform to share their experiences to drive positive change. Through the

NSAP, survivor-advocates can access opportunities to share their stories in the media, weigh in on Full Stop Australia's submissions to Government, and engage directly with Government. We are committed to centring the voices of victim-survivors in our work and advocating for laws and systems that genuinely meet their needs.

The Strategy is an important step towards addressing homelessness in NSW

Full Stop Australia supports the Strategy's vision of building service capacity and aspiring for homelessness to be rare, brief and not repeated in NSW. While the Strategy acknowledges that domestic and family violence are key drivers of homelessness,¹ the Strategy fails to adequately address the experiences of individuals navigating homelessness and their increased risk of sexual violence victimisation.²

Homelessness in Australia is a significant issue. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, more than 122,000 people are estimated to be experiencing homelessness in Australia.³ People who are at particular risk of homelessness include:

- People who have experienced domestic and family violence,
- Young people,
- Children on care and protection orders,
- First Nations people,
- People leaving health or social care arrangements, and
- Older Australians.⁴

Alarming, of all people who accessed specialist homelessness services (**SHS**) in 2023-24, over a quarter of people identified domestic and family violence as the main reason for needing help, making the largest cohort of SHS clients.⁵

The Strategy does not address the increased risk of sexual violence faced by people experiencing homelessness

While the state of becoming and being homeless is a traumatic experience in and of itself,⁶ once homeless, individuals experience increased risk and exposure to sexual victimisation.

¹ NSW Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035 Draft, 6.

² Suellen Murray, 'Violence Against Homeless Women: Safety and Social Policy' (2011) 64(3) *Australian Social Work*, 346, 347.

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Homelessness and Homelessness Services* (February 2025, Webpage) <[Homelessness and homelessness services - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2023-24* (December 2024, Report), 8.

⁶ Monique Phipps et al., 'Women and Homelessness, A Complex Multidimensional Issue: Findings from a Scoping Review' (2019) 28(1) *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 1, 6.

Studies have shown that homeless women experience violence as a ‘pervasive’ and ‘inescapable’ part of their lives.⁷ Women experiencing homelessness reported avoiding dark places or locations predominantly occupied by men at nighttime in the hope to navigate risk and keep safe from sexual violence throughout the nights.⁸ Even in temporary shelters or crisis accommodation, homeless individuals, especially women and young people, are at an increased risk of sexual violence and are not provided with adequate safety and security.⁹

Lack of secure housing compounds the vulnerability of people experiencing homelessness, exposing them to situations, people and decisions that can jeopardise their emotional, physical or psychology safety. An Australian study reported that 70% of young women and 20% of young men had been sexually assaulted while homeless.¹⁰ The study also found that homeless youth commonly reported witnessing and fearing sexual violence while homeless.¹¹

Another Australian study examines the pervasive experiences of sexual violence among homeless young people, emphasising how their vulnerability is compounded by precarious living conditions.¹² This study found that a significant proportion of homeless youth, particularly young women, have been victims of sexual violence, with rates as high as 76% in Australia.¹³ Many homeless youth reported engaging in ‘survival sex’ – exchanging sex for food, shelter or safety – which further exacerbated their safety concerns and exposed them to predatory individuals, thereby increasing risks to their health and psychological wellbeing.¹⁴

These alarming statistics and experiences show the importance of the Strategy explicitly addressing safety from sexual violence, to prevent further victimisation and the compounding of complex traumas. As it stands, the Strategy only mentions improving the safety of young people in temporary accommodation, and compliance with National principles for Child Safe Organisations.¹⁵ More needs to be done to ensure that all people experiencing homelessness are safe from sexual violence.

⁷ Suellen Murray, ‘Violence Against Homeless Women: Safety and Social Policy’ (2011) 64(3) *Australian Social Work*, 346, 348.

⁸ Helena Menih, ‘Come Night-Time, It’s a War Zone’: Women’s Experiences of Homelessness, Risk and Public Space’ (2020) 60(1) *British Journal of Criminology* 1136, 1145.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.

¹⁰ Jessica A Heerde et al., ‘Associations Between Youth Homelessness, Sexual Offences, Sexual Victimization, and Sexual Risk Behaviors: A Systematic Literature Review’ (2015) 44(1) *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 181, 182.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Catherine Alder, ‘Victims of Violence: The Case of Homeless Youth’ (1991) 24(1) *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 1, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ NSW Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035 Draft, 13.

Full Stop Australia recommendations

To effectively address homelessness in NSW, the Strategy must integrate a trauma-informed approach that recognises and prioritises both domestic and family violence as the leading cause of homelessness in Australia,¹⁶ and proactively considers the increased risks of sexual violence victimisation for individuals experiencing homelessness in NSW.

To strengthen the Strategy, Full Stop Australia recommends the following changes:

- 1. Acknowledge the increased risk of sexual violence victimisation among people navigating homelessness:** People experiencing homelessness, particularly those who have experienced sexual, domestic and family violence, face a heightened risk of further victimisation. It is crucial for the Strategy to recognise this vulnerability and ensure safety measures are integrated into housing and homelessness policies and programs. Addressing these risks is critical to ensure individuals are adequately supported while experiencing increased vulnerability and to prevent further harm.
- 2. Address domestic and family violence as a key driver of homelessness:** The Strategy fails to adequately recognise the drivers of homelessness, and specifically the role of domestic and family violence as the leading cause of homelessness in Australia. The Strategy must focus on addressing such drivers to truly solve homelessness in NSW. Early intervention and comprehensive specialist support for those at risk of and experiencing domestic and family violence is paramount to break the cycle of homelessness.
- 3. Increase investment in social housing:** There is a critical need to increase funding for social housing to ensure it can accommodate need. Currently, there is a significant lack of social and affordable housing. As set out in DVNSW's submission, 'due to a significant shortage of available social and affordable housing, only clients with the most complex needs and very low incomes are eligible for these housing supports'—and yet, many victim-survivors of domestic and family violence exiting refuges 'cannot secure a property in the highly competitive private rental market, where landlords typically prefer tenants on higher incomes.' This dire situation is further exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis and increased housing pressures, impacting households and individuals across Australia. As DVNSW raised in their submission, target investments by both the Commonwealth and NSW government are not sufficient to meet current need.¹⁷ More investment is needed to bridge the social housing gap and ensure that supply meets demand. This is essential at a time where more individuals and households are at risk of homelessness than ever before.¹⁸ We support DVNSW's calls for increased investment in social housing, with

¹⁶ AIHW (2025).

¹⁷ DVNSW Homelessness Strategy Submission, 11.

¹⁸ Ibid.

a social housing target of a minimum of 10% of occupied residential dwellings by 2050, and measures to increase access to transitional housing.

4. **Increase funding to specialist domestic and family violence homelessness services:** Expanding access to crisis accommodation specifically designed for individuals escaping sexual, domestic and family violence is vital. Refuges must be resourced to provide not only a physical place of safety but also access to support services such as legal, social and psychological specialist services. There must be resourcing to ensure the diverse needs of those fleeing sexual, domestic and family violence can be met. We support DVNSW's call for a 50% baseline funding increase (\$74.7 million in 2025-26) for all domestic and family violence services funded to provide homelessness support, so that frontline services have sufficient resourcing to meet demand.
5. **Provide people experiencing homelessness with access to wrap-around support to better support their health and wellbeing:** People with lived experience of sexual, domestic and family violence often experience unique, complex and compounded traumas. Wrap-around support services which offer tailored specialist support such as mental healthcare, social work, addiction support, legal services and financial counselling, alongside accommodation, enable people to get their various needs met while accessing safe housing. These services must be trauma-informed, accessible and culturally safe. Wrap-around support is essential to ensure that people navigating homelessness are supported during times of crisis. This would support with the Strategy's goals of ensuring homelessness is brief and not repeated.
6. **Ensure lived experience shapes and informs all policy responses and initiatives regarding homelessness in NSW:** Listening to the voices of those with lived experience of homelessness is critical to ensure the Strategy leads to more effective and tailored interventions. We especially support incorporating the voices of victim-survivors of sexual, domestic and family violence who have experienced homelessness into policy and program design, given well-established links between homelessness and these forms of violence.