

Full Stop Australia submission to the NSW Treasury Women's Economic Opportunities Review.



4 March 2022

**Hayley Foster, Chief Executive Officer
Laura Henschke, Legal and Policy Officer**

Introduction

The NSW Treasury is leading a landmark Women's Economic Opportunities Review (the **Review**) which will consider how to improve women's economic security through increased economic participation over the next 5-10 years. The Review is timely given the Federal Government is in the process of finalising the next National Plan to end Violence Against Women and their Children.

Full Stop Australia warmly welcomes this review as a once-in-a generation opportunity to develop meaningful policies and programs which will lift women's economic security and participation.

We are firmly of the view that any real improvement in women's economic security and participation is not truly possible without:

- a) Long-term, consistent funding for the sexual violence sector including funding for service provision, workforce development, training and capacity building.
- b) Urgently prioritising funding in the next and subsequent budgets for all support services who work with women who have experienced sexual violence in the workplace including sexual assault services, mental health services, legal services and healthcare providers.
- c) Developing and implementing a NSW Gender Equality Strategy which specifically refers to and takes steps to address workplace sexual violence.

The time for action is now.

Upon conclusion of the Review, we strongly urge the Government to commit to implementing our recommendations before the next election.

Funding and support for the sexual violence sector

The Terms of Reference for the Review state that the Government will prioritise reform options to support women to enter, re-enter and stay in the workforce.

These priorities are relevant to the sexual violence sector in two main ways:

- Equity Economics (2021) found that the NSW Social Sector as a whole employs over 230,000 people, with annual economic output worth \$15.4 billion. 4 out of 5 workers in this sector are women. Therefore, ensuring the NSW Social Sector is sufficiently supported is absolutely crucial to this priority. The sexual violence sector is a key component to the NSW Social Sector but has been critically underfunded for many years. This is despite the fact that sexual assault is the fastest growing crime in NSW.
- Ensuring that women are properly and meaningfully supported to heal and recover when they experience sexual violence (in all settings) is critical to ensuring that women stay in the workforce.

Funding to support women experiencing sexual violence

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

One in five Australian women (18% or 3.3 million) have experienced sexual assault since the age of 15 (ABS 2017). Sexual violence is most often perpetrated in the home, but can also be perpetrated in a range of educational, workplace, community and service settings. More broadly, sexual violence places greater strain on families, workplaces, and social, health and justice service systems. Violence against women and children is estimated to cost the Australian economy over \$22 billion each year (KPMG, 2016).

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

Impacts for women include:

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

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

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

Women 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 de-briefing. Family, friends and colleagues also need specialist advice and support to in-turn support their loved ones.

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.

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.

This is against a backdrop of an alarming rise in the rates of 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 and ensure they can enter, re-enter and remain the workforce.

Full Stop Australia recommends the NSW Government increase core funding to the NSW Sexual Violence Helpline by \$923,701 per annum to cover operational costs and meet rising unmet need.

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.

- 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); and
- 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. Furthermore, these at risk-priority cohorts also experience the most disadvantage when it comes to entering, re-entering and remaining in the workforce.

Therefore, if we are truly committed to investing in all women to recover from sexual violence in order to secure their economic empowerment, it is crucial that we specifically invest in the capacity of the sector to respond to the needs of our most disadvantaged and marginalised women.

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.

Funding to support the development of the sexual violence sector

The National Survey of Workers in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sectors (Cortis et al, 2018) surveyed 1157 workers and found that:

- **Qualifications lack preparation for the sector**
 - Only 22.0% of respondents reported that their formal qualifications prepared them 'very well' or 'extremely well' for working with people affected by violence. The results were higher for people with social work (29.5%) or community services, welfare, counselling or youth work (28.9%) qualifications.
 - Three in five workers with legal qualifications said their formal qualifications prepared them 'not very well' or 'not at all' for work in the sector, as did almost half of those with educational or psychology qualifications.

- **Induction training:** Less than 2 in 3 felt they received appropriate induction.

- **Areas for further training:** In terms of additional training required, the most common areas workers felt training was needed were (in order):
 - risk assessment;
 - therapeutic approaches;
 - legal training;
 - general counselling;
 - screening; and
 - supervision training.

- **Additional training to support specific client groups:** Many workers reported that they also needed additional training to support specific client groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, children and young people, LGBTIQ+ people affected by violence, people with disability, asylum seekers, people with experience of homelessness and perpetrators of violence.

This evidence clearly demonstrates a critical demand for:

- the development of specialized workforce to respond to sexual violence in a holistic and trauma-informed way; and
- the upskilling of all frontline workers so that they can properly respond to sexual violence.

Firstly, no accessible introductory training exists for frontline professionals either in NSW or nationally. This situation potentially creates gaps in service delivery and client outcomes, and it could also contribute to poor staff retention rates in the sector. It is essential that frontline workers have the ability to identify and respond in an appropriate and timely way to women who have experienced sexual violence. The kinds of skills and knowledge frontline services require include:

- A detailed understanding the breadth and context of sexual violence in NSW;
- Understanding the prevalence of sexual violence in at-risk populations;
- Learning about intersectionality and how this relates to the risks of sexual violence and barriers to accessing support;
- Understanding the impact of sexual assault;
- Learning how to identify and respond to disclosures in a trauma-informed way;
- Assessing risk and safety;
- Mandatory and best practice compliance in relation to sexual assault;
- Effective referral and linkage; and
- The importance of self-care in relation to sexual assault.

Full Stop Australia recommends the NSW Government fund \$277,500 for Full Stop Australia to develop and deliver introductory training in sexual violence to work in tandem with the [DV-Alert training](#) to increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of front-line workers.

Secondly, the sexual violence sector itself lacks specialized training. In particular, there is a lack of training for sexual violence professionals on how to respond to complex trauma. Complex trauma as a result of sexual violence is a significant national health and welfare issue. In our experience, there is a strong correlation between complex trauma and poor physical, psychosocial and mental health. The relationship between trauma and the ongoing needs of women victim-survivors is complex and requires collaboration between multiple service sectors to provide effective care for improved wellbeing. In our client's experience, sexual, domestic and family violence service systems are oriented towards providing an emergency crisis response or a needs-specific response (such as housing or court support). As a result, there are significant gaps in holistic complex trauma responses, particularly trauma specialist counselling and ongoing care navigation services for women with complex and ongoing needs. This often means that women who experience complex trauma 'fall through the gaps', which then compounds their trauma and exacerbates their psychological, physical, social and economic needs.

Full Stop Australia submits that it is crucial for women's long-term healing and economic recovery that sexual violence workers are trained on how to manage complex trauma. Full Stop Australia can deliver this training informed through our clinical work and 50 years' experience

of working directly with people who have experienced sexual violence, coupled with our work in primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

Full Stop Australia recommends that the NSW Government provide an additional \$419,500 in funding for Full Stop Australia to deliver specialized training to sexual violence professionals on how to respond to complex trauma.

Lastly, there is currently no established community of practice specifically for sexual assault services in NSW. This is a crucial omission for the sector which denies the sector the opportunity to formally share best practice, collaborate, identify systemic issues and develop a united voice. A community of practice is integral for the sector to enhance networking, the sharing of skills, research, and innovative ways of working.

It is essential that front line workers have the ability to identify and respond in an appropriate and timely way to people who have experienced sexual violence.

Full Stop Australia recommends the NSW Government fund a community of practice for sexual violence professionals.

Preventing and responding to sexual violence in the workplace

Kate Jenkins' world leading report *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces* (2020) found that not only was sexual violence in the workplace endemic, but it was also costing the economy billions of dollars and negatively impacting on women's economic empowerment.

Sexual violence in the workplace is endemic

The Australian Human Rights Commission National Survey into Sexual Harassment (2018) found that:

- almost two in five women (39%) and had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in the last five years;
- women were significantly more likely than men to experience sexual harassment over the course of their lifetime; and
- the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment was higher amongst certain groups of people, for example women, young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability and LGBTQIA+ people.

Jenkins (2020) also found that between 2017-18, Anti-discrimination NSW received the highest number of sexual harassment complaints of all the state based agencies.

Sexual violence in the workplace costs the economy and affects women's economic empowerment

Deloitte (2019) found that sexual violence in the workplace costs the Australian economy \$3.5 billion dollars annually, including approximately \$2.6 billion in lost productivity. The private sector shouldered much of this lost productivity cost. Jenkins (2020) therefore concluded that taking action to prevent and address workplace sexual harassment will result in better health and economic outcomes for workers and workplaces.

In relation to the link between workplace sexual harassment and women's economic empowerment, Jenkins (2020, p.294) had this to say

Sexual harassment and economic disempowerment are inextricably linked where the disruption to careers and income can create economic instability for victims and bystanders. The economic empowerment of women is central to realizing gender equality.

In our view, the evidence is clear and overwhelming. The NSW Government must take urgent action to resource organisations who support women experiencing sexual violence in the workplace and their supporters in order to boost women's economic empowerment.

Full Stop Australia recommends that the NSW Government urgently prioritise funding in the next and subsequent budgets for organisations which support women experiencing sexual violence in the workplace and their supporters including sexual assault services, mental health services, legal services and healthcare providers in line with Recommendation 55 of the Respect@Work report.

Gender Equality

The terms of reference to the Review state that the Review will identify and prioritise reform options which create the opportunities and conditions for women to succeed in the workforce, including equity in the workplace such as reducing the gender pay gap and improving women's leadership opportunities.

While this priority is warmly welcomed, it merely scratches the surface of what needs to be done to meaningfully secure women's economic empowerment. In our view, women's equality will not be achieved unless the NSW Government commits to preparing a whole of government strategy designed to ensure equality for all genders.

The proposed strategy should involve deep consultation with the sexual, domestic and family violence sector, stakeholders working towards gender equity in NSW, marginalized groups and the broader community. The proposed strategy would consider reforms such as:

- Closing the gender pay gap;
- Increasing workplace flexibility for people with caring responsibilities;
- Working with the Federal Government to improve workplace protections for employees impacted by sexual, domestic and family violence (such as universal domestic violence leave, employer mandated protections from sexual violence in the workplace);
- Universal access to affordable childcare;
- Ensuring equitable access to parental leave;
- Increasing women's leadership in all settings including business, government, sport, media, the arts and in community; and
- Working with the Federal Government to increase equity in superannuation, family law, taxation and social service systems (such as Centrelink).

Full Stop Australia recommends Women NSW in consultation with all stakeholders working towards gender equity in NSW, marginalised groups and the broader community, develop a NSW Gender Equality Strategy with a view to identifying urgent priorities which can be implemented now to increase gender equality in NSW.

Full Stop Australia recommends that the NSW Gender Equality Strategy address sexual harassment and sexual violence specifically and recognize that sexual harassment and sexual violence is driven by gender inequality and is a form of gender-based violence building on Recommendation 6: of the Respect@Work Report.

References

ABS. 2017. "Personal Safety, Australia." Australian Bureau of Statistics, Last Modified 8/11/2017. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release>.

AIHW. 2019. Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019. Canberra, Australia: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia-2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

AIHW. 2021a. "Family, domestic and sexual violence." Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Last Modified 16 Sept 2021. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence>.

Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) 2010. Family Violence — A National Legal Response. ALRC Final Report 114 <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publication/family-violence-a-national-legal-response-alrc-report-114/>

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2018). Everyone's business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sexual-discrimination/publications/everyones-business-fourth-national-survey-sexual>

BOCSAR 2021, NSW Recorded Crime Statistics quarterly update March 2021, Sydney, Australia. Last Modified 10 June 2021.

https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_media_releases/2021/mr-NSW-Recorded-Crime-Statistics-Quarterly-Update-Mar-2021.aspx

Brain Injury Australia, Monash University, Domestic Violence Victoria, No to Violence incorporating the Men's Referral Service and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, 2018. The prevalence of acquired brain injury among victims and perpetrators of family violence. <https://www.braininjuryaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/BRAININJURYAUSTRALIAfamilyviolencebraininjuryFINAL.pdf>

Campo, Monica. 2015. Domestic and family violence in pregnancy and early parenthood. 2021. <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/domestic-and-family-violence-pregnancy-and-early-parenthood>.

Campo, Monica and Sarah Tayton. 2015. Intimate partner violence in lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer communities, CFCA Practitioner Resource— December 2015, <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/intimate-partner-violence-lgbtqi-communities>

Cortis, N., Blaxland, M., Breckenridge, J., Valentine, k. Mahoney, N., Chung, D., Cordier, R., Chen, Y., and Green, D. (2018). National Survey of Workers in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sectors (SPRC Report 5/2018). Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre and Gendered Violence Research Network, UNSW Sydney. <http://doi.org/10.26190/5b5ab1c0e110>

Deloitte Access Economics. (2019). The Economic Costs of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace [The economic costs of sexual harassment in the workplace | Deloitte Australia | Economics](#)

Equity Economics. (2021) The Social Sector in NSW, Capitalising on the potential for growth, March 2021, [EE NSW Social Sector SPREADS WEB.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

Flores, Andrew, Ilan Meyer, Lynn Langton, and Jody Herman. 2021. "Gender Identity Disparities in Criminal Victimization: National Crime Victimization Survey, 2017–2018", American Journal of Public Health 111, no. 4 (April 1, 2021): pp. 726-729. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.306099>

Jenkins, Kate. 2020. Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney, Australia. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/respectwork-sexual-harassment-national-inquiry-report-2020>

KPMG. 2016. The cost of violence against women and their children in Australia Final Report. https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2016/the_cost_of_violence_against_women_and_their_children_in_australia_-_summary_report_may_2016.pdf.

Segrave, Marie, Rebecca Wickes, and Chloe Keel. 2021: Migrant and refugee women in Australia: The safety and security study. Monash University. Report. <https://doi.org/10.26180/14863872>

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). 2011. Preventing violence against women in Australia: Research summary, p 5. Last Modified 16 March 2017. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/violence-against-women-in-australia-research-summary>