



What can South Australia do to prevent the rising rate of domestic violence?

A Summary of Shelter SA work on the Prevention of Domestic Violence

As the peak body for housing in South Australia, it is Shelter SA's priority to advocate for improved housing outcomes for everyone, including people who are living on low incomes. For the first time in history, the number of Australian women seeking homelessness support services outnumbers that of men.¹ This figure is largely impacted by the existence of domestic violence (DV), one of the leading causes of homelessness.

Shelter SA produced a [research project](#) exploring prevention versus crisis management policies, legislation and service delivery in South Australia. Shelter SA concluded that South Australia is lagging behind some of the other States in terms of preventative strategies. A workshop was held to solidify the findings of the report by hearing from fifty South Australians working across community services, non-profit organisations and government sectors. Shelter SA's [workshop report](#) collates the key messages emerging from the workshop with reference to the research report.

The research report defines key differences between the primary and secondary prevention of DV, concluding that true prevention of DV occurs through challenging traditional beliefs and stereotypes about gender. The findings of the research and workshop reports confirm there is a lack of primary prevention policy and service delivery in South Australia. Despite the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children and recommendations about an increase in community education and respectful relationships education, not enough efforts have been made to implement DV education in schools State-wide. Implementing age-appropriate programs in schools for every child, similar to Victoria's Respectful Relationships program, would ensure that young people are equipped with knowledge and awareness of how to avoid violence. While there are existing programs currently operating in South Australia they lack the funding and support to be extended across the State education system.

Shelter SA's key asks from the research project and workshop report include:

- › An increase in primary preventative strategies rather than a focus on crisis managing DV;
- › A State-wide implementation of Respectful Relationships following Victoria's example;
- › A State-wide workforce development strategy to encourage men to get involved within the DV sector as educators, role models and workers;
- › An increase in DV-specific homelessness services as well as DV services catering for cultural minorities and the LGBTQIA community;
- › More funding for services to work with male perpetrators;
- › An increase in social housing to provide long-term affordable housing for homeless DV victims; and

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2016-17 <http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2016-17/contents/clients-in-regional-and-remote-areas>

- › A collective impact approach to enable a collaboration across government, the workforce, educational institutions and the community to achieve social change and improve awareness of DV.

According to the South Australian Attorney-General's Department, more than one third of homeless DV victims seek help from non-specialist DV services for homelessness. With a large proportion of victims receiving accommodation without specialist help and services, they lack proper counselling and may struggle to achieve independence from their abusive partner.

Disregarding crisis accommodation, there is also a critical lack of long-term social housing available across the State to provide a safe and affordable home for women and their children fleeing DV. Left without a place to call home, many DV victims may return to their abuser for financial support.

As DV is one of the leading causes of homelessness, adequate social housing must be provided for people escaping abusive partners. Many victims struggle to leave crisis accommodation or shelters and live independently due to lack of housing affordability. It is impossible for people living on low incomes to re-establish a home in the private rental market and South Australia must meet the need and demand for social housing.

Shelter SA workshop participants supported the need for an increase in appropriate services for minority groups. This includes more culturally-appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Members of the LGBTQIA community also require increased representation within the DV services. There are limited prevention strategies in place to specifically assist the LGBTQIA community in South Australia. In addition to this, many DV services cater to specific genders that may make people identifying as LGBTQIA feel misplaced and excluded. Services must be redesigned to incorporate assistance specific to vulnerable groups.

The Shelter SA workshop report highlights the need for more men working as educators, role models, workers and advocates in the DV space. A State-wide workforce development strategy is crucial to encourage men to be included in the conversation surrounding violence against women.

Participants from government and community services agreed that we must put an end to siloed approaches between services. We must develop a Collective Impact approach to enable collaboration across government, the workforce, educational institutions and the community to achieve social change and improve awareness of DV.

Overall Shelter SA and the workshop participants established that there is an unbalanced approach towards crisis managing DV victims versus preventing violence. Shelter SA will continue to push for change within South Australia, and advocate for increased prevention programs to reduce DV rates and DV-related homelessness. Shelter SA is calling for Respectful Relationships programs to be funded in all schools in South Australia to create the possibility of ending domestic violence as our current young generation move into adulthood.