

MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release: 17 March 2020

NSW Government announces changes to domestic violence service responses in response to COVID-19

The NSW Government has made a series of changes to domestic violence service responses in response to COVID-19.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

In response to calls for an expansion of temporary accommodation support periods, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice have issued instructions to service providers that **if they need to access temporary accommodation for affected clients to ensure they can self-isolate**, they can get in touch with their District Contract Manager to advise and **the Department will cover the costs for this**.

“This is a welcome change as it means women and children fleeing violent and abusive homes at this time will still have a viable option to do so even in the face of women’s refuges reaching capacity or going into lockdown” says Hayley Foster, chief executive officer for Women’s Safety NSW.

COURT ADVOCACY AND SAFETY ACTION MEETINGS

From today, the NSW Police Force will be advising protected persons (victims) not to attend the first mention date for apprehended domestic violence orders (ADVOs) matters at court. Instead police domestic violence liaison officers (DVLs), working closely with women’s domestic violence court advocacy service workers (WDVCASs), are to seek oral instructions from victims.

Also, from today, Safety Action Meetings (SAMs), which are interagency meetings between Police, domestic violence services, child protection, health, housing, corrective services, education and other agencies managing risk and safety for serious threat cases, will be conducted via audio visual link, Skype or teleconference until further notice.

LOCAL COURTS

The Chief Magistrate of the Local Courts of NSW has issued a [statement](#) of changes for distribution. Changes include for example all appearances by persons in custody wherever possible to be made by AVL, list matters currently pending to be dealt with electronically, pleas to be entered via email or in writing, and the court not requiring attendance of the person in need of protection in respect of any application brought by police for a Domestic Violence Order unless the proceedings are fixed for hearing.

POLICE RESPONSES

In response to concerns raised by members, Women's Safety NSW have requested assurances from the NSW Police Force that both women and children's safety (and the safety of all victims of DV) continue to be prioritised at this time, notwithstanding the difficult and unusual circumstances in which we now find ourselves.

More specifically, that:

1. Consideration is given to the use of exclusion orders where appropriate to exclude alleged domestic violence offenders from the home; and
2. Children are included as protected persons on provisional apprehended domestic violence orders (ADVOs) as appropriate in the circumstances.

FINAL COMMENT

"It is absolutely essential in times of crisis such as this that women and children's safety doesn't fall off the radar" says Foster "We know we are going to see increasing rates and severity of domestic and family violence at the same time as services are under pressure themselves to maintain their face-to-face operations. Women and children facing domestic and family violence need to be able to rely upon these civil protection mechanisms for their protection – now more than ever."

ABOUT:

Women's Safety NSW is a peak body for women's domestic and family violence specialist services providing the primary response to women and their children impacted by domestic and family violence across NSW. Member services supported 51,383 women across NSW last year across its Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCASs), Safer Pathway and Family Advocacy Support Service (FASS) programs. Women's Safety NSW advocates on the systemic issues impacting upon women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence through legislative, policy and practice reform.

Women's Safety NSW is on the Policy Advisory Committee to the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA).

CONTACT:

Hayley Foster, Chief Executive Officer | 0474 779 847 | ceo@womenssafetynsw.org.au