

## The Benevolent Society: Policy recommendations on domestic violence, 2009

During 2009 The Benevolent Society put forward a range of policy positions regarding domestic violence. These recommendations address prevention, the kinds of programs which should be funded, and how services can best work together to support women and children.

### Prevention

- Domestic violence is gender-based violence that violates women's fundamental human rights. It is strongly related to inequality between men and women and the holding of rigid views about gender roles. To prevent domestic violence, governments must address gender inequality (for example through pay parity and provision of affordable childcare). Governments should also fund sustained community awareness raising activities in a range of settings (such as schools, the workplace and sporting clubs). The Benevolent Society also advocated for the introduction of paid parental leave. The Australian Government's decision to do this is very positive and will assist.

### Programs

- **Accessible services:** Services which support women to leave situations of domestic violence and to heal can only be effective if they are accessible. This means services which have flexible hours, accessible locations, are affordable (which often means free), culturally sensitive and which can be accessed anonymously.
- **Beyond crisis:** Domestic violence can result in deep trauma for women and children and the long-term costs can be significant. When the crisis is over, women and children need access to ongoing therapeutic services which support them to heal and thrive. Services which build women's skills, financial literacy and social networks also play an important role in supporting long-term wellbeing.

### Working together

- **High level government coordination and commitment:** Effective and mutually reinforcing services which respond appropriately to domestic violence require national and state-wide coordination and adequate resourcing. Governments must recognise that the costs of domestic violence are borne across departments, just as the solutions require cooperation

across departments. Women should be able to access appropriate support, irrespective of which government department or government-funded agency that they come into contact with. There should be “no wrong door”.

- **Coordinated and complementary services:** Women and children who experience domestic violence can come into contact with multiple government departments, private and not-for-profit organisations providing services such as health, justice and housing, as well as specific domestic violence services. Community-level initiatives which coordinate services have the best chance of achieving a positive outcome for an individual and not letting them “fall through the cracks”. Practitioners working in generalist services need specialist training in responding to domestic violence sensitively and effectively.
- **Domestic violence and child protection:** Domestic violence is a factor in many child protection cases and responses to both issues need to be coordinated. This requires shared training for staff, strong referral pathways and coordinated state level plans.

#### **For more information**

- [Submission on NSW Domestic Violence Strategic Framework](#): March 2009
- [Community safety issues paper](#): May 2009
- [Moving Forward Research](#): June 2009

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