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Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
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Submission – Delivery of National Outcome 4 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children

The South Australian Premier's Council for Women (the Council) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

The Council is a high-level independent advisory body. We advise the Premier of South Australia and the Minister for the Status of Women on issues relating to women to facilitate a whole of government approach to meeting the needs of women in South Australia. The views expressed in this submission are those of the Council and do not represent those of the South Australian Government. The Council has a long-lasting relationship with women's domestic violence services in South Australia, each of the services provides excellent support to women in times of extreme need, including over the phone and in person counselling as well as emergency accommodation support and safety planning.

The Council understands that some controversy has arisen in the delivery of National Outcome 4 with the refusal of Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia (RDVSA) to take up the new panel partnership delivery model for counselling services through 1800RESPECT. It is understood that RDVSA does not consider that private contractor Medibank Health Solutions, which maintains 1800RESPECT, can guarantee client confidentiality or quality of care. RDVSA seems to be suggesting the new panel partnership delivery model will not provide a quality service. We fundamentally disagree with this suggestion.

Women's Safety Services SA (WSSSA) has agreed to be one of the services in the 1800RESPECT panel partnership delivery model. It is the largest women's domestic violence service in South Australia with extensive experience in providing client-focussed service to the women of South Australia. Currently WSSSA provides the Domestic Violence Crisis Line which helps women with over the phone counselling, information and safety planning.

WSSSA is a women led service for women, which has a long history in South Australia. It is directly connected to the first domestic violence shelters run in South Australia which women created under their own initiative when no government services existed. It is of great importance that women led

services such as WSSSA are resourced to continue providing their high quality services to women experiencing or escaping domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

The Council is aware that the crisis line and the counselling services of WSSSA are trauma-informed services, with WSSSA staff understanding the impact of trauma and its consequences through long years of service to women experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault. It is incorrect to suggest that a South Australian service is not equipped to provide the same high quality trauma-informed service as is currently received through 1800RESPECT.

As a telephone and online service, 1800RESPECT counselling services can be delivered from anywhere within Australia. All panel members have experienced and qualified staff, committed to ensuring the continuation of a quality service for people experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault. There is no reason to consider that the physical placement of counsellors will make a difference to the quality of the counselling services delivered through 1800RESPECT. Having counsellors based outside New South Wales will not mean the women of New South Wales, or any other state, will notice a difference in service.

1800RESPECT is an important service for Australians seeking support when experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault, it must not be diminished by the current controversy and it must be recognised that all the new service providers are experts in the field and will continue to deliver a strong and supportive service to all Australians.

Finally, the Australian Government must ensure there is no disruption to 1800RESPECT when the panel partnership is due to begin service delivery. Calls to 1800RESPECT must not be allowed to go unanswered at any time. This would severely affect the goodwill already generated by 1800RESPECT within the community and with women's services, and may lead to clients avoiding the service.

It should be noted that Ms Maria Hagias, Chief Executive WSSSA, is a member of the Council, however, she has removed herself from involvement in this matter and is not a signatory to this letter. Ms Louise Pascale is a member of the WSSSA Board.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Members of the Premier's Council for Women:

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