



Government
of South Australia

Office for Women

Domestic Violence Roundtable

29 June 2018

Berri

Report prepared by the Office for Women for the Minister for Human Services and the Assistant Minister for Domestic and Family Violence Prevention



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Introduction

On 29 June 2018 the South Australian Government held a roundtable for those working in the domestic, family and sexual violence sector in the Riverland area, to specifically discuss the 2018 election commitments made by the State Government.

This report provides an overview of:

- Points raised in relation to the Government's election commitments discussed under the groupings of Protection, Infrastructure and Support, and Service Responses; and
- Feedback received from a follow up survey sent to all those stakeholders who were invited.

The roundtable attendees were provided with a copy of the Government's commitments, as well as a summary document prepared by the Office for Women (OFW) providing a more detailed overview of the commitments.

Unlike the metropolitan roundtable, the Riverland roundtable had a more focused, targeted approach in engaging attendees specifically on the ramifications of, and issues related to, election commitments in their specific locale.

Election Commitments Feedback

This section discusses specific issues raised under each of the election commitments based on the groupings of Protection, Infrastructure and Support, and Service Responses.

This feedback will be integral to the upcoming new Violence Against Women Policy Framework.

Protection

Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme

There was strong agreement that there was merit to the Scheme. Issues specific to the Riverland were raised, largely relating to privacy. The feedback provided indicated that attendees thought that SAPOL should lead the Scheme via their Family Violence Units, with other agencies providing services as required, particularly during disclosure. There were also questions raised relating to the operation of the Scheme, including how victims would be supported and what sorts of information would be disclosed.

Reviewing Police guidelines re responding to Intervention Order (IO) breaches & Tougher penalties for IO breaches/ Keeping Victims Informed

There was robust discussion regarding IOs, which were linked to penalties for breaches and the need to keep victims informed. Due to the way discussion progressed, these three areas have been combined in this report.

Attendees were of the view that more notice needed to be given to victims about the release of perpetrators, in order to allow time for families to adjust, to intervene early to make sure the family is safe at home or can implement safety planning with an appropriate service, and to address potentially high risk situations with 'safe at home' type responses. By informing victims early, there was clear agreement that an opportunity for greater engagement with victims would be provided.

Additionally, responses to perpetrators were considered inadequate in regional areas. There was consensus in terms of needing to provide complementary services to perpetrators to stop them committing more violence. These themes were touched on again during discussion of the Crisis Accommodation commitment.

There were no objections to tougher penalties for IO breaches. Rather, discussion focused on the justice system, with attendees suggesting that magistrates need greater understanding of domestic and family violence (DFV), including women's experience of DFV and that the judiciary should be held be more accountable for decisions made in relation to DFV, particularly related to perpetrator management.

Discussion during the day also noted that judges should be making mandatory orders for perpetrator programs, even without charges.

Infrastructure and Support

A funded peak body for DV services

There was support for this commitment. Attendees were of the view that with additional funding, the Coalition of Women's Domestic and Aboriginal Family Violence Services (the Coalition) could undertake additional work, with suggestions including media engagement, the development of websites and other awareness-raising mechanisms about the complexities of DFV (for example, why women may stay in these relationships), as well as providing education and training about DFV. There were also suggestions that the Coalition could have a role in primary prevention education, particularly in school based settings.

No interest loans for women's shelters

Concerns were raised regarding this election commitment, such as:

- The focus on women's shelters, when South Australia does not have a shelter model, and there is a need for perpetrator housing once the perpetrator is removed from the home
- A potential disconnect with Safe at Home initiatives, which seek to keep women safe in their own homes and which is fundamental to the South Australian model

- Concerns that this funding is merely a loan, creating difficulties for small and not-for-profit organisations being able to pay them back.

Improving communications (data sharing)

Notes taken by attendees indicate that there are some issues with data collection, including the use of multiple databases and failure for some databases to 'speak' to one another.

There also appeared to be some confusion in relation to what information can be shared, which may indicate the need for training or resources about the operation of the Information Sharing Guidelines.

Personal Protection App

General consensus on this election commitment was that a new app was not required. There was support for the proposal in relation to utilising the existing Victim Support Service app. Other feedback suggested that there would be capability to 'hide' the app, as well as providing the app to victims for longer periods of time than is currently the case. Additionally, there were questions raised regarding evaluation of the existing app.

Service Responses

Safety hubs

Lack of time meant that further feedback was required in relation to the Safety Hubs. For this reason, specific questions about the Hub and potential models were included in the Survey.

However, initial feedback at the roundtable indicated that while there was support for and some benefit to the Hub model, there would be issues specific to regional areas.

Notes provided by attendees indicate a range of options to consider, including the use of community health or local Government facilities as 'shopfronts', potential roles for volunteers, the engagement of sexual assault services, legal advice services and other health screening services (for example, for breast cancer). There was support for a model which brings services together, in order to facilitate wrap around support for victims as well as perpetrators. A 'no wrong door' response was also flagged as being made possible via the Hubs, which would prevent victims from having to repeat their stories to multiple service providers and help to ensure positive engagement with the community, victims and perpetrators.

Crisis Accommodation

This commitment created a great deal of discussion, which primarily focused on perpetrators.

It was agreed that, generally, crisis accommodation for women would not be useful in regions – it would stand out and therefore potentially increase risk for victims. There was strong support for very short term accommodation options for victims if necessary, with attendees agreeing that more must be done to keep victims and their children in the family home, with IOs being utilised appropriately to immediately remove perpetrators. This linked to a discussion about SAPOL needing to review guidelines for the removal of perpetrators.

Should victims not wish to stay in the family home, consideration could be given to stand alone family accommodation units, which should be pet friendly. Attendees noted, however, that regional areas have issues with keeping such units ‘under the radar’, with perpetrators easily being able to locate victims.

There was overwhelming agreement that new crisis accommodation facilities would in fact be most beneficial if they were designed as transitional accommodation for perpetrators, with wrap around services provided. These services could include perpetrator response programs, as well as drug and alcohol, mental health, family reconciliation programs and so on. Utilising accommodation in this way would also allow for appropriate procedures to be developed for things like child visitation, and would also provide bail addresses for perpetrators.

24/7 Crisis hotline

Members of the roundtable agreed that a 24/7 crisis hotline would enable women to seek support ‘in the heat of the moment.’

Additional information in notes from attendees suggested that there were questions raised regarding time frames for responses and post-call service follow up, as well as whether there would be an opportunity for 24/7 online chat, with instant response capability, with the ability to delete the chat user history

More targeted rehabilitation for DV perpetrators

There was strong agreement that there was significant need for additional programs for perpetrators in the Riverland, including mandated programs.

Attendees were also of the view that a triage model for perpetrators would be beneficial, taking them from crisis to recovery (with a complementary model for victims and children operating).

Other

Outside the above election commitments were a few remaining points raised by attendees.

These included:

- The need for pet friendly accommodation for victims of DFV

- The development of assertive outreach models across the board, particularly in regional areas which can currently be difficult currently due to staffing numbers
- The need for better transitions from crisis, to supported, to permanent accommodation for perpetrators
- Lowering risk thresholds so that victims can more easily access safe at home and other programs.

Survey

A follow-up survey was conducted after the Roundtable to provide the opportunity for those that weren't able to attend, as well as those that did attend to reaffirm that the key themes noted above were reflective of the discussions on the day.

Three responses were received. The responses indicated that the key themes were captured correctly.

Specific questions regarding the Safety Hubs were also a key component of the survey. Two detailed comments regarding the Safety Hubs were received and were largely reflective of the conversations which took place on the day. The comments were supportive of multi-agency hubs with services for victims and their children being based in Berri (or Renmark).