



Government
of South Australia

Office for Women

Addressing the financial burden of mortgages and loans on people experiencing domestic and family violence





1 Contents

2. Acknowledgement of Country	3
3. Executive Summary	4
4. Background	5
Financial Burden Roundtable – Mortgages and Loans.....	6
5. What key issues were discussed?	6
Support pathways vary significantly across banks and other financial institutions, creating confusion for victim-survivors	6
The change from in-person to digital banking is impacting victim-survivors ability to seek support.....	7
Victim-survivors would benefit from further guidance and preventative information from financial institutions on how to protect their finances	7
People working in financial institutions require clear guidelines on how to support customers experiencing violence	7
Low and fixed-income older women need increased access to home ownership products	8
6. What are the potential solutions?	8
Financial institutions to explore the creation of resources on domestic and family violence to provide to all customers	9
Financial institutions to consider reviewing and exploring improvements for existing training on identifying and responding to domestic and family violence, in partnership with the specialist domestic and family violence sector	9
Financial institutions to investigate ways to ensure a more consistent and unified approach to domestic and family violence across the finance and banking sector.....	10
Financial institutions to explore the potential use of new technology to better identify when domestic and family violence is occurring.....	10
The SA Government and specialist domestic and family violence sector to investigate ways to raise public awareness of the impact of domestic and family violence on financial health.....	10
Other proposed solutions	10
7. What was accomplished?.....	11
8. What’s next?	11



2 Acknowledgement of Country

The South Australian Government acknowledges and respects Aboriginal peoples as the state's first peoples and nations and recognise them as traditional owners and occupants of land and waters in South Australia.

Further, we acknowledge that the spiritual, social, cultural and economic practices of Aboriginal peoples come from their traditional lands and waters, that they maintain their cultural and heritage beliefs, languages and laws which are of ongoing importance, and that they have made and continue to make a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the state.

Help and Support

This publication discusses domestic and family violence. These topics can often be distressing. If you are in need of support, or want to talk to someone about how you are feeling, you can contact:

1800 RESPECT by calling 1800 737 732

Mensline by calling 1300 78 99 78

If you or someone you know is currently experiencing violence and needs support, please contact:

Domestic Violence Crisis Line by calling 1800 800 098

This service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In an emergency, please call 000

3 Executive Summary

The South Australian Government made a commitment to work with the finance and real estate industries to explore options to ensure that women impacted by domestic and family violence do not bear the brunt of unpaid rents, mortgages and loans that go unpaid due to domestic and family violence.

People impacted by domestic and family violence often face significant financial and legal repercussions due to unpaid rents, mortgages and loans. As well as impacting their financial security and stability, these repercussions can severely limit their ability to obtain new housing.

On 20 November 2023, the South Australian Government hosted a roundtable on the financial burden of mortgages and loans on people impacted by domestic and family violence. This summary paper summarises the key findings and themes arising from the discussions and outlines suggestions for improved responses.

The purpose of the roundtable was to explore potential solutions and innovative actions that may ease the financial burden of people experiencing violence, enhance connection and conversation between the SA specialist domestic and family violence sector, government and the finance sector, and increase knowledge and understanding across all sectors about the financial barriers faced by women impacted by domestic and family violence. It was attended by representatives of the finance industry, the specialist domestic and family violence sector, housing providers, and advocacy organisations.

Key **findings** from the roundtable discussions included:

- Support pathways vary significantly across banks and other financial institutions, creating confusion for victim-survivors and highlighting a need for a standardised approach.
- The change from in-person to digital banking is impacting victim-survivors ability to seek support.
- Victim-survivors would benefit from further guidance and preventative information from financial institutions on how to protect their finances.
- People working in financial institutions require clear guidelines on how to support customers experiencing violence.
- Low and fixed-income older women need increased access to home ownership products.

Collaborative **solutions** suggested at the roundtable included:

- Financial institutions should explore the creation of resources on domestic and family violence to provide to all customers.
- Financial institutions should consider reviewing and exploring improvements for existing training on identifying and responding to domestic and family violence, in partnership with the specialist domestic and family violence sector.
- Financial institutions should investigate ways to ensure a more consistent and unified approach to domestic and family violence across the finance and banking sector.
- Financial institutions should explore the potential use of new technology to better identify when domestic and family violence is occurring.
- The SA Government and specialist domestic and family violence sector to investigate ways to raise public awareness of the impact of domestic and family violence on financial health.

4 Background

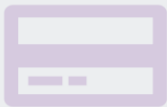
Women who have experienced domestic and family violence often face significant financial and legal repercussions due to unpaid mortgages and loans. As well as impacting their financial security and stability, these repercussions can severely limit their ability to obtain new housing.

The South Australian Government is committed to ensuring that women do not bear the brunt of mortgages and loans that go unpaid due to domestic and family violence.

The Problem



\$5.7 billion is the estimated direct cost of financial abuse to victims ¹



Almost **20%** of women in South Australia have experienced economic abuse from an intimate partner ²



Nearly **1 in 4** women in South Australia have experienced emotional abuse from an intimate partner ³



Around **3 in 10** South Australian women have experienced violence from an intimate partner ⁴



Approximately **40%** of people accessing homelessness services in Australia have experienced family and domestic violence ⁵

¹ Deloitte, Commonwealth Bank, The Cost of Financial Abuse in Australia 2022

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2021-22 Personal Safety Survey

³ ABS, 2021-22 Personal Safety Survey.

⁴ ABS, 2021-22 Personal Safety Survey.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022-23.



Financial Burden Roundtable – Mortgages and Loans

On Monday 20 November 2023, the South Australian Government hosted a roundtable on the financial burden of mortgages and loans on people impacted by domestic and family violence.

A discussion paper was circulated prior to the roundtable to provide background information on the topic and issues at hand. The paper included research about the impacts of domestic and family violence on housing security, financial wellbeing, and key information on current responses to people experiencing violence who have mortgages or loans. Additionally, the paper set out a series of questions to inform discussions at the roundtable.

People with lived experience of domestic and family violence also shared their stories of experiencing financial hardship and housing issues to help guide discussions.

The event was opened by the Hon Katrine Hildyard, Minister for Women and the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Liana France, Director of Inclusion Policy and Reform in the Department of Human Services, and Kate Fox, Executive Officer of the SA Financial Counsellors Association, co-facilitated the event.

The **purpose** of the roundtable was to:

- explore potential solutions and innovative actions that may ease the financial burden of people experiencing violence;
- enhance connection and conversation between the SA specialist domestic and family violence sector and the finance sector, and;
- increase knowledge and understanding within government of the financial issues and barriers faced by women impacted by domestic and family violence.

The roundtable was attended by 37 people, including representatives from the finance industry, the specialist domestic and family violence sector, housing providers, and advocacy organisations.


Attendees included representatives from major organisations including NAB, Westpac, CommBank, ANZ, Bendigo and Adelaide Bank, Credit Union SA, HomeStart Finance, Shelter SA, Beyond Bank, National Council of Women SA, Zahra Foundation, Embolden, Domestic and Family Violence Alliance, South Australian Council of Social Service, and Centre for Women’s Economic Safety.

5 What key issues were discussed?

Support pathways vary significantly across banks and other financial institutions, creating confusion for victim-survivors

The various responses banks and other financial institutions provide to domestic and family violence can cause confusion for victim-survivors accessing services and make it difficult to navigate the necessary processes to access support.

This problem is exacerbated by the varying names financial institutions use for their support departments. For example, support for people experiencing violence may be accessed through a Hardship Department, Wellbeing Team, or Financial Assistance Unit.



A consistent process for accessing support across financial institutions would reduce the time and energy victim-survivors spend on researching and identifying pathways to support, make it easier for victim-survivors to request assistance, and allow victim-survivors to know what they are entitled to.

The change from in-person to digital banking is impacting victim-survivors ability to seek support

The way people are engaging with their financial institutions is changing. This impacts how banks and financial institutions communicate and work with their customers. Traditionally, customers would attend branches in-person to discuss their finances. Today, customers contact their financial institutions online, through email, mobile apps and chatbots, over the phone, and through brokers.

Participants recognised that branches are disappearing and customers are increasingly operating through brokers. It was suggested that as much as 70% of mortgages are now organised using brokers.

Financial institutions need to adapt to keep pace with the changing ways people interact with them. It is important that regardless of the entry point to the financial institution, victim-survivors have clear pathways to accessing support. For example, one participant noted that ‘red flag’ training focuses on in-person identification and similar processes should be developed for customers who make contact online and over the phone.

Victim-survivors would benefit from further guidance and preventative information from financial institutions on how to protect their finances

There is a lack of awareness from customers of financial institutions regarding how to protect themselves and their finances. Separating finances from a partner can be a complex process and many customers are unaware of the actions required to successfully separate finances and gain financial independence.

Greater awareness of credit score reporting and repair processes is required. In many cases, victim-survivors may not be aware their credit is damaged until they apply for a new loan. Additionally, greater understanding of the importance of ‘two to sign’ protocols on joint accounts is required. Where a joint account is ‘one to sign,’ perpetrators may withdraw money without consent or knowledge of their partner.

Guidance from financial institutions and banks is required to ensure customers are aware of their rights and the steps that can be taken to protect themselves financially. A preventative approach would benefit victim-survivors, with information on separating finances provided prior to the opening of joint accounts.

People working in financial institutions require clear guidelines on how to support customers experiencing violence

Staff within financial institutions can find it challenging to appropriately respond to people experiencing violence or suspected to be experiencing violence. Staff are often unaware of how to approach the topic with customers and what supports are available for victim-survivors.

Despite mortgage brokers being increasingly used by financial institution customers, they have no formal avenue for reporting domestic and family violence to their clients’ banks.

Participants discussed the difficulty of wanting to help customers where they have suspicions of domestic and family violence, but also fearing potential repercussions for the victim-survivor if they do raise the topic.

Financial institutions have obligations to both the perpetrator and the victim-survivor as customers of the institution, and staff often receive conflicting stories from the two parties - both customers may say they are experiencing violence, or one may accuse the other of fabricating allegations.

Where abuse is identified, there is limited support that staff can provide beyond referrals. While banks can assist customers by putting them on financial hardship plans, this does not always stop the servicing needs of loans. Additionally, financial institutions also have limited ability to support victim-survivors with their credit scores. Banks typically need to wait for a client to go into default before they can take action. Furthermore, to suppress negative impacts on credit scores, victim-survivors may need to provide evidence to their bank of domestic and family violence or financial abuse.

Low and fixed-income older women need increased access to home ownership products

Older women are one of the fastest growing populations experiencing housing insecurity in Australia and require increased access to home ownership products.

Roundtable participants highlighted the challenges faced by low or fixed-income older women in accessing home ownership products. Although policies vary between banks, many older women are prohibited for obtaining home loans due to their age.

Financial and home ownership products should take into consideration diversity, inclusivity, and social equity to broaden access for home ownership for women who may not have traditionally been able to access home ownership.

6 What are the potential solutions?

Potential Solutions



Financial institutions to explore the creation of resources on DFV to provide to all customers



Financial institutions to consider reviewing and exploring improvements for existing training on identifying and responding to DFV, in partnership with the specialist DFV sector



Financial institutions to investigate ways to ensure a more consistent and unified approach to DFV across the finance and banking sector



Financial institutions to explore the potential use of new technology to better identify when DFV is occurring



The SA Government and specialist DFV sector to investigate ways to raise public awareness of the impact of DFV on financial health



Financial institutions should explore the creation of resources on domestic and family violence to provide to all customers

All customers of financial institutions should be provided with information regarding domestic and family violence and financial abuse. This information should be readily accessible, available in multiple languages, easy to read, and informed by lived experience.

The resources could include explanations of what domestic and family violence is and what financial abuse looks like, who victim-survivors can contact for assistance, and steps customers can take to protect their finances.

Providing all customers with this information both raises awareness of domestic and family violence and financial abuse, and also raises awareness of the support that is available. This is essential as it minimises the risk victims-survivors face when they seek out this material or are provided it by financial institution staff in response to suspicions of domestic and family violence. Additionally, this provides an opportunity to clearly outline the path that people experiencing violence must navigate to seek support.

Information relating to domestic and family violence and financial abuse should also be provided to all customers when establishing a mortgage or loan. This information should clearly outline what will happen in the event of a separation, and the repercussions of using joint accounts or loans to impact another person financially (such as restricting their access to the account or transferring funds to an individual account without the other person's knowledge or permission).

Suggested resources included:

- A checklist of all the considerations and actions that can be taken when separating finances from a perpetrator.
- Poster-type information displayed in branches.
- Information provided to customers when on hold.

Financial institutions should consider reviewing and exploring improvements for existing training on identifying and responding to domestic and family violence, in partnership with the specialist domestic and family violence sector

A recurring theme at the roundtable was the need for improved training, informed by lived experience, for staff in financial institutions to adequately identify and respond to domestic and family violence.

Training should be an ongoing process with regular follow-ups and reminders. Training should be provided to all staff within financial institutions, including bank staff and mortgage brokers, as domestic and family violence can present at any point in a client's use of services.

Training resources could be shared across financial institutions to ensure all institutions can provide staff training. This is important as smaller and/or community-based institutions may not have the resources to implement training and require further support.

It was suggested that training covers:

- What is domestic and family violence, coercive control and financial abuse.
- Red flag identification – online and in-person.
- Understanding intersectionality.
- Actions to take when suspecting someone may be experiencing violence.



Financial institutions should investigate ways to ensure a more consistent and unified approach to domestic and family violence across the finance and banking sector

Participants largely supported adopting a standardised approach across the finance sector to provide victim-survivors with support. A consistent approach across all financial institutions would provide victim-survivors with a clear pathway for accessing support and minimise the need to navigate through institutions to find assistance.

The process for providing support should consider collaborative partnerships between financial institutions and the specialised domestic and family violence sector, as well as lived experience advocates.

Some participants suggested the approach should be collaborative across financial institutions, allowing institutions to share information. This would allow institutions to monitor and review customers flagged by other institutions as potentially experiencing or perpetrating violence. This approach would require the careful review and updating of relevant legislation, including privacy laws, to determine what information can be disclosed.

A consistent approach to providing support should also extend to a consistent process for credit repair and managing joint accounts where there is domestic and family violence present.

Financial institutions to explore the potential use of new technology to better identify when domestic and family violence is occurring

A common discussion point throughout the roundtable was the possibility of utilising new technology to identify domestic and family violence and financial abuse.

Existing technology, such as those used to detect scams, could potentially be modified to identify domestic and family violence and financial abuse red flags. Known cases of domestic and family violence could be examined to identify patterns for the algorithms to detect. However, participants noted that there is often no friction in the system or easily identifiable red flags in cases of domestic and family violence, making it hard to identify.


The SA Government and specialist domestic and family violence sector to investigate ways to raise public awareness of the impact of domestic and family violence on financial health

There is a need for greater public awareness of the impact of domestic and family violence on financial health. Additionally, there is a need for initiatives that boost financial literacy across the community.

Customers often have limited understanding of domestic and family violence and financial abuse. Increased awareness of how finances are handled in non-abusive relationships may make it easier for victim-survivors to recognise signs of financial abuse and coercion. Increasing financial literacy will also have the benefit of improving victim-survivor's ability to protect their finances and recover from financial abuse.

Other proposed solutions

- Implementing a similar program to [Ask for Angela](#) for financial institutions. Ask for Angela is an international campaign designed to promote safety in licensed venues. Patrons can



discretely seek assistance from staff if they are feeling unsafe by asking for ‘Angela.’ This code word alerts venue staff the person requires assistance.

- Advocating for banks to change their [Terms and Conditions to address financial abuse](#).
- Increasing regulation across financial institutions.

7 What was accomplished?

The roundtable was successful in bringing together the banking and finance sector with key stakeholders in South Australian Government agencies, the domestic and family violence peak bodies and lived experience advocates. To end the financial burden of mortgages and loans on people experiencing domestic and family violence, it is essential to build partnerships between these sectors. The connections formed at the roundtables between industries will create opportunities for future collaboration and holistic, coordinated supports.

The roundtable helped establish a collective understanding of the issues faced for people with mortgages and loans and experiencing domestic and family violence. The roundtable additionally increased knowledge and understanding within government of the financial issues and barriers faced by women impacted by domestic and family violence.

Importantly, the roundtable explored potential solutions and innovative actions that may ease the financial burden of people experiencing violence. This is essential as financial stability is a critical part of supporting the safety and wellbeing of people impacted by violence, and we must make sure people with mortgages and loans are provided solutions that are equitable, appropriate and effective.

The roundtable also supports the recommendations delivered by the [Housing Security for Older Women Taskforce](#). In particular, the roundtable addressed recommendation 1.8, ‘Support advocacy of responsible lending rules that increases access to home ownership products for low or fixed-income older women.’ This was achieved through engagement with financial advisors and the financial services sector at the roundtable to highlight the challenges low or fixed-income older women face in accessing home ownership products and identifying advocacy opportunities and avenues.

Following the roundtable, the contact details of all attendees were distributed to ensure participants could continue to connect and make progress on these issues and potential solutions.

8 What’s next?

The South Australian Government will continue to collaborate with financial institutions, the specialist domestic and family violence sector and other key stakeholders to raise awareness of these issues and advocate for improved responses.

We extend our sincerest thanks to roundtable attendees, and appreciate the effort they made to participate in these important discussions. We encourage attendees to keep in contact with other participants and the Office for Women.