

Recommendations

These recommendations affirm the direction of and strategies identified in the Victorian Women with Disabilities Network Advocacy Information Service's *A Framework for Influencing Change: Responding to Violence against Women with Disabilities 2007 – 2009*. They should be considered in developing the proposed whole-of-government *Strategic Framework for Family Violence Reform*, which intends to guide action on addressing violence against women in Victoria until 2013.

1. Key recommendations: A human rights approach

- 1.1 That the core human rights principles of equality, human dignity, mutual respect, freedom from violence, participation and empowerment, accountability, equity and access are reflected in the strategies, policies and practices adopted to improve family violence services to women with disabilities.
- 1.2 That this human rights approach involve a three-part strategy in order to improve the access of women with disabilities to family violence sector services *throughout the state*:
 - The incorporation of issues facing women with disabilities into all aspects of the family violence service system.
 - The resourcing of specific initiatives to address issues for women with disabilities that can serve as 'beacons' of good practice.
 - The resourcing and further strengthening of existing specialist, disability and family violence advocacy services and peak bodies (such as VWDN AIS, DVRCV and DV Vic) to expand their capacity to provide advice, secondary consultation and education to the family violence service response system.

2. Active participation by women with disabilities

- 2.1 That the human rights and social justice principle that groups (including women with disabilities) be provided avenues to actively participate in policy and decision-making bodies in respect to violence against women be respected and upheld by the appointment of at least one woman with disability to each violence-related policy and decision making body.
- 2.2 That women with disabilities be resourced to represent their concerns in key advisory, governance and planning forums at national, state, regional and local levels, in accordance with the human rights principles of equality, human dignity, mutual respect, participation, accountability, equity, access, empowerment and freedom from violence.

3. Service delivery

- 3.1 That an audit of crisis accommodation (refuges, shelters, outreach and associated support services) is undertaken to establish accessibility and service issues regarding women and children with disabilities.
- 3.2 That secure, affordable, long-term accommodation is made available to women and children with disabilities experiencing violence.
- 3.3 That an emergency supported care fund is established for women and children with disabilities when their caregiver is arrested or removed from the home.
- 3.4 That intensive case management is promoted as a method of working with women with disabilities within practice forums.

4. Cross-sector collaboration and capacity building

- 4.1 That leadership at statewide, regional and local levels encourages the building of relationships, capacity and exchange of respective expertise between disability, family violence and the broader community sectors. This might, for example, include linking together Rural and Metro Access workers, the integrated family violence networks, and the Local Area Service Networks. The capacity building work needs to be investigated and supported by the SAFER Research Program.
- 4.2 That the government allocates specific resources for the development of cross-sector relationships and pathfinder projects between the family violence and disability sectors.
- 4.3 That the government supports, and disseminates information about, good practice developments in the area of disability and family violence that emerge in response to local circumstances.
- 4.4 That ongoing support (and funding) is provided for good practice 'beacon' developments which provide the platform for leadership and positive developments across the sector.
- 4.5 That local services take responsibility for developing interagency collaboration at a local level between the disability and family violence sectors.
- 4.6 That services take advantage of the Victorian Government's initiative (through DPCD's Office for Disability) to resource health and community agencies to develop disability action plans and that the Office for Disability and Family Violence Unit within DPCD monitor these developments.

5. Information and communication

- 5.1 That all services develop accessible information, with procedures in place to ensure requests for information in alternative formats are provided in a timely manner that (a) provide family violence information to women with disabilities and (b) provide information about access to programs and facilities for women with disabilities.
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5.2 That prevention strategies for people with disabilities, including programs on healthy relationships, which are currently lacking, be considered as part of the Victorian Government's violence prevention program.

6. Data collection

That key agencies, such as courts, police and SAAP services review and improve data collection processes in the following ways:

- 6.1 Women are asked: (a) do they have a disability and (b) what information about their particular needs as clients with disabilities does the agency need to know in order to provide a service? This would include recording if a client requires: accessible accommodation; supported accommodation; personal care assistance; Auslan interpreter; Independent Third Person; an advocate; a communication assistant; independent living; case management; brokerage; more time in which to communicate; or any other support needs in relation to the clients' disabilities.
- 6.2 Data identifies experiences of violence and the nature of disability of participants/clients at agency, regional, state and national policy levels.
- 6.3 Data is disaggregated according to gender, age, sexuality, cultural and linguistic background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, and nature of disability (for example, physical, hearing, vision, speech and/or cognitive impairment an/or mental illness). The presence of *multiple* disabilities needs to be recorded for each person.
- 6.5 The category of 'carer' is provided when collecting data about the relationship between a victim and a perpetrator.
- 6.6 Auslan is incorporated in language categories along with other non-English languages.
- 6.7 Existing data is further analysed to explore reasons for – and policy issues indicated by – the difference in access to housing and accommodation for women with disabilities experiencing violence compared with other groups seeking access to housing and accommodation.

7. Family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines

- 7.1 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines include in their shared understanding of family violence an acknowledgement of the diverse domestic arrangements in which it occurs and recognise the potential for carers to be perpetrators of violence against women with disabilities.
 - 7.2 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines include information about supporting women and children with disabilities *throughout* the document and also include a *dedicated* section about supporting women and children with disabilities.
 - 7.3 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines discuss the importance of collecting disability data. This needs to include information
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about 'victims', 'perpetrators', any children involved and the nature of disability (including the presence of multiple disabilities).

- 7.4 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines discuss the importance of collecting information about particular needs of clients with disabilities so that the agency can provide a service. This would include recording if a client requires: accessible accommodation; supported accommodation; attendant care; Auslan interpreter; Independent Third Person; advocate; communication assistant; independent living; case management; brokerage; more time in which to communicate; or any other support needs in relation to the clients' disabilities.
 - 7.5 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines identify the 'presence of a disability' as part of the common risk assessment procedure.
 - 7.6 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines explicitly discuss the provision of information in accessible formats with procedures in place to ensure requests for information in alternative formats are provided in a timely manner and what inclusive communication practices entail. This means using a range of methods of communication (for example, in gaining and recording consent) including:
 - Clear standard print (Vision Australia's guidelines recommend at least 12 point font, preferably Arial or Univers) or large print (Large Print as recommended by the Round Table for the Print Disabled in 18 point, but users may have their own preferences)
 - Audio on CD (CDA or DAISY CDs), mp3 files on a website for downloading (Vision Australia can provide information regarding suitable audio formats)
 - Braille
 - Format accessible to people with cognitive disabilities, for example, Easy English and Plain English
 - TTY and SMS
 - Electronic text in CD in conjunction with access software, for example, Braille printer, voice synthesiser
 - Electronic text in email in conjunction with access software
 - Accessible websites (Vision Australia can provide guidelines).
 - 7.7 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines explicitly discuss the issue of physical accessibility of services and programs for clients with disabilities. There needs to be an endorsement of the principles of universal design whereby all future products, environments and communications should be designed to consider the needs of the widest possible array of users.
 - 7.8 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines discuss explicitly the development of cross-sectoral collaboration, partnerships and protocols between family violence and disability sectors at local and regional levels.
 - 7.9 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines provide a context to supporting women and children with disabilities by demonstrating awareness of the relevant disability legislation and other useful resources. This includes:
 - Legislation that makes it unlawful to discriminate against people with disabilities (the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, the Victorian *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*)
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- Legislation that protects the rights and responsibilities of people with disabilities (Victoria's *The Disability Act 2006* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*)
 - The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
 - WWDA's 2007 *More than just a ramp: a guide for women's refuges to develop disability act action plans*
 - The *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)*
 - VWDN AIS' online resource collection
www.vwdn.org.au/clearinghouse.htm
 - DVRCV's webpage on disability and family violence
www.dvrcv.org.au
- 7.10 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines are informed by a gender perspective on family violence and disability.
- 7.11 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines are informed by a human rights/social justice perspective on family violence and disability.
- 7.12 That family violence sector standards, codes and guidelines discuss the need for workforce development to include disability awareness training in relation to family violence.

8. Workforce development

That funding agreements require workforce development strategies that give particular consideration to identifying the need for strengthening and furthering training, and:

- 8.1 That family violence is made a *compulsory component* of all of the TAFE community sector profession courses (Certificate IV) and includes a focus on disability and violence. Additionally, training on violence against women needs to include education about women with disabilities being at greater risk of being targets of violence and thus incorporate how to respond to women with disabilities in all generic training programs. This will ensure a maximum number of family violence workers have access to skills and expertise on supporting women with disabilities;
- 8.2 That the *Strategic Framework for Family Violence Reform* incorporates and sustains the disability and family violence training currently being offered. For example, there needs to be ongoing funding of training programs for disability workers (such as DHS' *Women with a Disability Family Violence Learning Program* and associated practice forums);
- 8.3 That training programs emphasise and explore the ramifications of the fact that women with disabilities experience violence in diverse residential settings;
- 8.4 That government provides funding to enable education about family violence and its impact on women and children with disabilities to be incorporated into the training of the judiciary, lawyers, and court officials;
- 8.5 That the relevant legislative frameworks for disability and family violence are incorporated into the training of workers in the disability and family violence sectors;
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- 8.6 That all domestic and family violence workers are trained to respond to the needs of all women, including women with disabilities, and that they develop policies to ensure access and non-exclusion from service provision;
- 8.7 That the promotion of training in relation to marginalised issues needs leadership from managers and strong support from regional coordinators and word of mouth.

9. Monitoring, research and evaluation

- 9.1 That a statewide research project be undertaken in order to understand the help-seeking experiences of women with disabilities living with violence and the experiences of family violence workers in supporting women with disabilities across metropolitan, rural and remote areas.
- 9.2 That statewide research be undertaken in order to ascertain the prevalence and extent of violence against women and children with disabilities in the full range of residential settings.
- 9.3 That monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the Victorian family violence reform initiatives on supporting women with disabilities experiencing violence be undertaken, as part of the SAFER Research Program.
- 9.4 That women with disabilities are prioritised in the development of the Victorian Family Violence Prevention Plan and in its implementation at policy and practice levels.
- 9.5 That further research, possibly through the SAFER Research Program, is undertaken to investigate the extent to which women with disabilities are offered an exclusion condition in an Intervention Order and how their safety (and that of their children) can be assured.

10. National-level recommendations

The preceding recommendations are Victorian-focused. The recommendations below are identified for consideration at the national level.

- 10.1 That a national strategy on violence against women with disabilities be developed that would include:
 - Raising community awareness about violence against women with disabilities in diverse domestic and residential settings. This should be underpinned by a consistent definition of family violence across Australian jurisdictions that include carers as potential perpetrators of violence.
 - That a national research project be undertaken in order to: ascertain the prevalence and extent of violence against women and children with disabilities in the full range of residential settings; and understand the help-seeking experiences of women with disabilities living with violence and the experiences of family violence workers in supporting women with disabilities.
 - The continued dissemination of information in a range of alternative formats at national, statewide, regional and local levels.
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- Professional and educational development in universities and TAFEs across all relevant sectors.
 - A national research and service mapping project about the needs of women with disabilities living with violence to identify gaps for additional resources.
 - The establishment of national monitoring and evaluative processes to measure the prevalence and nature of violence against women and children with disabilities.
 - The establishment of a national data collection snapshot to provide data on women with disabilities within domestic and family violence statistics.
- 10.2 That a national audit of SAAP-funded services (including women's refuges, shelters, outreach and support services) be conducted with a particular focus on accessibility for women with disabilities experiencing violence.
- 10.3 That a research methodology, that provides a model to capture data inclusive of women with disabilities and their concerns, be developed and promoted to relevant data collection and research bodies, for example Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- 10.4 That the Commonwealth Government's homelessness strategy gives recognition to the high level of homelessness for women with disabilities experiencing violence (and people with disabilities, more generally).
- 10.5 That the above recommendations be overseen by a national working party on violence against women with disabilities and linked to the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children.
- 10.6 That women with disabilities be resourced to represent their concerns and actively participate in key policy and decision-making bodies in respect to violence against women at national level, in accordance with the human rights principles of equality, equity, access, participation, empowerment and accountability.
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