



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

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Inquiry into Domestic and Family Violence—Policy approaches and responses

Submission No. 15
Beryl Women Inc.

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We work on Ngunnawal land

Inquiry into Domestic and Family Violence —
Policy approaches and responses

Submission to ACT INQUIRY INTO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE 2017/18

September 2017

www.beryl.org.au

Beryl Women Inc. acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families.

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Beryl Women Inc. (Beryl) is Australia's longest running women's domestic violence refuge. Since 1975, we have provided specialist, expert services and support for women and children escaping domestic violence. On average, Beryl supports up to 50 women and 100 children in crisis a year. We constantly have to turn women and children away as there aren't enough spaces available to meet the overwhelming number of families escaping domestic violence. Adding to this pressure, Beryl has had to make changes to the way it delivers its service due to funding cuts the last several years. For example, we have made two positions redundant, reduced the level of support previously provided to clients and closed down our offsite office to relocate staff on site with clients, taking up space that had been delegated to the Children's program, a shed on site being converted to accommodate the Children's Program.

Beryl continues to provide essential services to women and children due to its strong commitment to tackling domestic violence and supporting the ACT community. However, Beryl acknowledges the funding constraints have a tangible impact on the quality of service and outcomes, and well-being on its staff.

Recommendations

In making decisions about new policy and programs in the ACT and providing budget allocations, we ask the ACT Government consider the following recommendations:

- A funding model that:
 - supports specialist domestic violence services to be financially capable in supporting clients
 - recurrent funding that provides sustainable and long-term planning for women's refuges
 - recognises and rewards expertise in this area, including attaining positive outcomes,
 - and acknowledges that homelessness funding does not cover the complexities that women and children escaping domestic violence are experiencing.
- The ACT Government review options for re-focusing and/or diversifying funding streams for specialist domestic/family violence accommodation services in line with relevant Directorates e.g. Justice and Community Safety, and Health.
- Formal recognition of services specialising in domestic/family violence, and the delivery of activities across the policy continuum.
- More research on the benefit of specialist domestic and family violence services.
- A centralised and uniform strategy for monitoring and evaluation of various services (including comparative analysis of different service models), to support a move to an outcomes based framework.

Beryl Women Inc. welcomes the opportunity to share its views on the *Inquiry into Domestic and Family Violence—Policy Approaches and Responses*.

Executive Summary

In this submission, we raise the following issues:

- The importance of retaining a specialised focus on domestic violence (intimate partner violence).
- Recognising organisations delivering services across the policy continuum.
- The risk that an outcomes framework may preference larger organisations, rather than foster improved outcomes, without centralised research and monitoring and evaluation support.
- Funding arrangements should be reconsidered to recognise the higher short-term cost of specialist services, and to ensure the long term benefits are realised.

About our service

Beryl is a community organisation and is one of only two specialists domestic violence (DV) accommodation services in the ACT region. Beryl is committed to providing high quality support and safe accommodation to women and children escaping DV.

For over forty two years we have been working towards the elimination of domestic violence and we are proud that we retain a feminist focus upon cultural diversity and inclusive employment practices and service delivery.

Beryl has extensive experience working with women from diverse backgrounds. (55.2% of our clients identify as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and 11.5% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (stats from 2016/17),

Beryl recognises that violence against women and children is prevalent in our society and injustices such as sexism, racism and economic inequality contribute to families living in crisis. To redress this, Beryl provides a service that fosters diversity and is based in social justice.

Beryl works within a trauma-informed framework. Our service improves health and wellbeing outcomes and develops client capacity in a range of areas. This includes response to the immediate crisis faced by clients and also supporting women to increase their skills and confidence to ensure their own safety well into the future. Capacity building can be a form of healing for women, and can be a preventive measure that reduces the likelihood of future violence against women. Put simply, Beryl supports women to learn to recognise the cycle of violence and better protect themselves against violent offenders in the future.

Beryl is in a unique position to work closely with vulnerable families due to the supported accommodation nature of the service. In this context, staff provide intensive case management, counselling and support for women and children. Given this approach, we are better placed than other non-accommodation family support services to offer ongoing support and guidance through difficult times.

The importance of retaining a specialised focus on domestic violence (intimate partner violence).

- Beryl recognises the need to support and develop a policy for all the diverse experiences of domestic and family violence (i.e. the recognition of different types of violence which can occur, under a range of different relationships, for example siblings). However, in broadening our response to, and understanding of, domestic and family violence, it is important we do not lose sight of the endemic nature of domestic violence in Australia, particularly, violence against women from an intimate partner.
- Policy responses should be rooted in this feminist framework, noting how gender inequality contributes to intimate partner violence. While other forms of violence occur all too regularly and need to be considered in policy, women remain at far greater risk from an intimate partner, than from other violent relationships. Domestic violence (particularly intimate partner violence) must be recognised as the single greatest threat faced by women in Australia.
- This type of violence is unique in that it is not only about individual conflict, or the perpetrator committing an act of criminal violence (although this is often a factor). Domestic violence almost always stems from a range of assumptions and values about women. It is a violent expression of control and power, underpinned by the belief that it is okay to subject women to this type of treatment simply because they are women.
- Tackling domestic violence cannot be addressed simply by hiding women from violent partners, or prosecuting offenders (although we should continue to do both things). It will require a national commitment to promoting and fostering gender equality, across a wide range of platforms.
- The importance of specialist domestic violence women's services, such as Beryl, will be critical in this work, not only to support women who experience violence, but to advocate for the promotion of women's human rights and equality.

Recognising organisation delivering services across the continuum of policy responses.

- Investment across the policy continuum (prevention, early intervention, crisis intervention, support services and other) is essential to addressing domestic and family violence.
- Specialist services such as Beryl fulfil a range of functions across all aspects of the continuum:
 - **Prevention:** advocacy, information and public awareness campaigning, training and coaching for women in the service to prevent future risk.
 - **Early intervention:** advocacy, proactively offering advice and information to women (including attending women's events to provide training and advice on the cycle of violence) and talking to people about what to do if they suspect a friend or loved one is experiencing violence.
 - **Crisis intervention:** crisis support and trauma informed services for women escaping violence, during or immediately after an episode.

- **Support Services:** trauma-informed support and capacity building after the episode of violence.
- **Other:** holistic family and community support including running specialist youth and children’s programs, community outreach, cultural events, workplace support (for example attending women’s network events to talk about women’s issues including domestic violence) and a board development program to provide leadership development opportunities for women in the ACT.
- Despite the demonstrated ability for specialist services like Beryl to deliver effective services across the policy continuum, current funding arrangements do not sufficiently support this work.
 - Funding is provided largely for crisis intervention, and support services. While these are critical aspects of the work Beryl does, they cannot address domestic violence alone.
 - The preventative and early intervention work of Beryl is far more difficult to measure (as you must measure something which didn’t occur), but equally important.
 - Yet, funding arrangements can constrain organisations’ ability to deliver these important services, and reporting fails to capture when and how they are occurring.
- Beryl welcomes the opportunity to be involved and work collaboratively in building the evidence base around what works and what does not in domestic and family violence services.
 - However, it is important that participation in these activities does not detract from front line services because of resource limitation and staffing shortages.
 - Any future policy should consider how to support and fund services that deliver beyond the requirements of funding agreements, across the continuum.
 - Consideration should also be given as to how these organisations can be supported to measure and evaluate the success of preventative and early intervention activities.
- Beryl would also welcome the opportunity to participate in research which compares and contrasts the long term benefits of specialist domestic violence and trauma informed services, against other mainstream programs.
 - While there are some higher costs short term associated with smaller organisations delivering specialist support, there is a range of evidence suggesting the long term cost benefit of these services, due to the improved outcomes offered by specialist support service.
 - This should be considered as part of any strategy to build an evidence base around what works and what does not, for domestic and family violence.

An outcomes framework may preference larger organisations, rather than foster improved outcomes, without centralised research and monitoring and evaluation support.

- A move toward outcomes-based funding should be underpinned by a stronger evidence base, and stronger centrally supported monitoring and evaluation.
- As previously raised, some aspects of the policy continuum are difficult to measure (particularly preventative measures, which can have the highest long term cost-benefit). This is why many organisations rely on output measures (days of service, number of clients etc.) to measure their service footprint.
- Without centralised support and research, a move to outcome-based funding may preference larger organisations that have greater administrative and reporting capability, rather than funding organisations that deliver better client outcomes, but lack the resources and staffing to provide longitudinal evidence of these outcomes.

Funding arrangements should be reconsidered to recognise the higher short term cost of specialist services, and to ensure the long term benefits are realised.

- Beryl supports the ACT Government's initiative to reform polices to end violence against women and their children. However, without additional funding to specialist domestic/family violence accommodation services in the ACT, tackling domestic and family violence in the ACT community will not be fully realized.
- Currently Beryl is funded under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) which is matched by the ACT Government. This funding is allocated under the homelessness agenda and does not take into account the complex nature of domestic and family violence, the cross-portfolio issues of justice and health, or the higher costs of operating a specialist support service and working within a trauma-informed framework.
- The service costing model used by the ACT Government is based on homelessness service provision which has left specialist domestic and family violence services struggling to remain fully effective and viable.
 - A range of work done by these services is not captured, or recognised, particularly preventative work (such as community outreach, information sharing and awareness raising).
 - Yet there is a wide body of evidence highlighting the long term cost benefit of these preventative activities. If specialist services are not adequately supported to remain viable, it is likely there will be reduction in specialist services, resulting in an increased future cost to the ACT Government.
- Beryl received a 32% funding cut over a three year period with outputs remaining the same, this has placed additional pressures on the service including significant staffing cuts, relocation of services, and increased case load in order to continue providing a service to women and children escaping domestic or family violence within a best practice and trauma informed framework.
 - There is a significant risk Beryl Women Inc. may face forced closure due to the ongoing funding cuts.

- Not only would this have a significant impact on the ACT community, it would mark a significant loss to the country given Beryl's longstanding DV expertise and identity as Australia's longest running women's DV refuge.
- The current model and funding to the ACT Specialist Homelessness Services is inadequate and overwhelmed by demand. Presently domestic/family violence has reached a national crisis point, with media highlighting the plight of thousands of women and children; in the ACT we are not immune. Beryl is funded under homelessness, even though we are a specialised domestic/family service which provides crisis accommodation (among a range of other services to support women and children escaping family/domestic violence).
- Beryl notes the majority of funding cuts over the last several years have been born by services that specialise in responding to the needs of children, young people and adults living with the impacts of trauma. These services are often women's services offering a model of care that allows specialist support and housing options, which can be the determining factor in improving outcomes for women and children.
- Reduced capacity in women's services will lead to some women delaying access to services, which will increase the harm experienced prior to seeking support and result in more complex needs.
- Funding cuts impact service delivery and translates to services like Beryl not being in a position to deliver the same level of support to women and children.
- The impacts of trans-generational trauma, poverty and social exclusion, coupled with the experiences of domestic and family violence and racial discrimination, give rise to a client group whose needs cannot be serviced by short term crisis accommodation.
- Beryl's children's program is based around prevention and early intervention.
 - We note that children are the highest client group of the service
 - Yet, short-term funding that allows for only one *Child and Adolescent Specialist* to work with each child/client on an individual basis is unrealistic and is indicative to the qualitative outcome.
 - Given that Beryl is seeing second and third generation clients, it is clear we are not reaching children effectively and early enough. It also reflects the broader social issues of dislocation, marginalisation and generational patterns.
- This prompts Beryl to query how we can better provide family interventions that are more children focused. It also encourages us to reflect on what interventions are needed to improve the situation for children, and how we can improve our approaches to sustain and strengthen the children's everyday social context (connection).
 - Beryl has also been considering ways in which we can strengthen the roles of extended families, schools, early childhood facilities, home based supports and the local community.
 - However, without adequate funding, Beryl's ability to take action in these areas (which require longer-term areas of need) is limited due to our pressures in undertaking its often demanding day-to-day activities in providing crisis support.

Summary

Beryl Women Inc. request the ACT Government consider the recommendations put forward in this submission. Beryl is eager to work with the ACT Government to develop robust policy responses and interventions for the ACT community.

