

MINISTER FOR WOMEN'S SPEECH

THURSDAY 29 APRIL 2010

OLDER WOMEN AGEING SAFELY FORUM

Thank you for the warm introduction Sonia. I am very pleased to be here and to speak at such an important forum.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are standing on today and pay my respects to elders past and present.

I would like to commend the [Older Women's Network](#) for organising today's event.

The wealth of knowledge and expertise from members of the Network continues to contribute to the discussion and progression on issues surrounding violence against older women- and most certainly informs the work of Government. Both Sonia and Ludo are great advocates for the Network. They've met with me and very strongly put forward the case of older women.

The safety of older women is a key priority for the NSW Government and a particularly important area for me, as Minister for Women.

As you have already discussed here today, one of the most critical issues associated with older women's safety is homelessness.

Over the past few years there has been an alarming increase in the number of older women experiencing domestic and family violence, poverty and homelessness.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program statistics show conclusively that older women, as a demographic, are increasingly accessing supported accommodation services in NSW.

...And these are women who have raised families and been employed for much of their lives.

However, it is well known that women's employment is often part-time and can involve career gaps to raise children and to act as primary carers for other family members.

Unfortunately, this arrangement does not typically provide women with sufficient financial security, or adequate superannuation to ensure their wellbeing in later years.

These, and other factors, can result in older women facing financial insecurity, being more likely to be on the full pension, and to rent rather than own their own home.

We know that these factors can act as significant barriers to older women leaving violent relationships. Paradoxically, older women also face a high risk of homelessness if they do leave violent relationships.

Unfortunately, whilst the issue of under-reporting violence by all women is well known, under-reporting by older women and their specific needs with regard to support and housing services, are often not acknowledged.

Clearly this is a complex issue. That message was clear from the Network's research project and resulting report "*The disappearing age: a strategy to address violence against older women*", which the NSW Government supported.

The report identified six recommendations that the Network saw as primary strategies in addressing the issue of violence against older women.

The NSW Government accepted all of the recommendations and through the DV grants program gave a further \$35,000 to the network to implement the recommendations.

And I know my colleague, the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health Carmel Tebbutt, spoke with you this morning and announced almost \$6000 to support a program that works with general practitioners to screen older women patients for violence and abuse and provide appropriate referral.

The fact that you have had two Ministers to your Forum today is a very clear indication of how important the issues you raise are to Government.

As the Minister for Women I am well aware of the need for improved coordination of Government services and integration of responses to domestic violence, particularly for older women.

Programs and services in the human services sector cannot be developed in isolation from each other.

To this end, the NSW Government is currently working on a number of projects that seek to adopt a more efficient and improved collaborative

response to domestic violence, and more specifically to the safety of older women.

For example, the Staying Home Leaving Violence project is a homelessness prevention strategy for women living with domestic and family violence. The program seeks to support women to escape the violence whilst remaining safely in their own home, with the violent person removed.

The intensive case management approach taken in the Staying Home Leaving Violence service model relies on high level collaboration between multiple government agencies all working towards the same objective, the long-term needs of each client.

This level of coordination was established through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the government agencies involved.

I am happy to say that the Staying Home Leaving Violence Program was recently expanded to a further ten locations, totalling 18 locations across NSW.

Another program that utilises an interagency service delivery model is the Start Safely Program, which provides financial assistance to people living with domestic violence, to enable them to move into private rental accommodation.

Through this program, a woman can receive subsidised rents for up to twelve months, on top of any existing Commonwealth rent assistance entitlement.

The Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services Program which is currently operating in seven locations across NSW, is also designed to provide a coordinated Government response.

This Program, through multi-agencies, seeks to prevent the escalation of domestic and family violence among high risk groups, including older women.

It enables women to use one door to access the range of services they require such as housing, aged care, health, in order to be safe.

In addition to these integrated services there are also currently 140 Domestic Violence Liaison Officers within the NSW Police Force. These specialist Officers, located in Police Stations across the State, provide

the critical link between reporting a crime and accessing community service providers.

These Officers are educated in domestic and family violence-related issues, including those specific to older women, and are able to provide referrals for victims to appropriate support and housing services.

We are also working with the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research to establish a more detailed reporting process on violence against women in NSW. This aims to provide Government with more detailed information regarding the prevalence, trends and patterns of domestic violence – including with regard to older women.

As NSW Minister for Women, I coordinate the Government's response to this issue and I can assure you that we will continue to work hard to prevent and reduce violence against women and particularly to support the safety of older women in NSW. I know how difficult it can be for organisations like yours when there are so many issues you need to bring to Government but it is my job to be your advocate. I know you need meetings with the Minister for Ageing, Minister for Health, the Minister for Housing, and the list goes on. Getting those to face-to-face meetings can be very difficult so today I give you a commitment that I

will do what whatever I can to help coordinate your advocacy to Government.

It is often said that the true measure of any society is its ability to protect the most vulnerable in it. This is particularly true of older women who are victims of domestic violence or at risk of domestic violence - they are vulnerable, often isolated and marginalised and they often suffer in silence.

As Minister for Women I will continue to work hard with my Cabinet colleagues to ensure that older women are protected, are safe and are empowered.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today and I wish you well with the rest of the forum.