



Women's Economic Security Package

Specialist Domestic Violence Units and Health Justice Partnerships

November 2018

What is the measure?

- The Australian Government will provide ongoing funding of \$31.8 million over three years from 2019-20 (ongoing), to continue the existing Commonwealth-funded specialist domestic violence units (DVUs) and health justice partnerships (HJPs) across Australia.
- DVUs provide integrated legal and social support services needed by women experiencing family violence, while the HJPs deliver legal assistance services, at local hospitals or health centres, to women experiencing family violence.
- This measure provides for the existing DVUs and HJPs to continue and to be expanded to provide integrated financial advice, counselling and literacy services to women.

Why is the Government funding this?

- Family violence contributes to women's economic insecurity. Situations of family violence are often characterised by financial abuse and women frequently face economic disadvantage and financial hardship as a result of abusive and controlling relationships.¹
- The addition of financial counselling and related support services in areas of high need across Australia will support women in or leaving violent relationships by providing them with the support, information and skills to achieve greater economic security in the immediate and longer term.
- This measure also provides funding certainty for the providers of DVUs and HJPs. Prior to this measure, funding for these services was due to expire on 30 June 2019.

What is the expected impact of the measure?

- The evaluation of the DVUs and HJPs indicates that the integrated model of legal and social support service has been reaching vulnerable women who may not otherwise access support services.
- The expected impact of this measure is to reduce the financial hardship experienced by women as a result of family violence. For example, legal assistance services can effectively advocate on behalf of women to have debts waived or payments deferred, while financial support services can assist women with financial planning following separation from a violent relationship.

¹ For example, a 2014 study by ACT Domestic Violence Crisis Service ([Staying at Home after Domestic Violence](#)) found that 77% of women who sought to remain in their homes after separating from violence relationships faced financial hardship and 62.5% of women living in private rental properties lost their homes within twelve months of separation.

Case study

A Queensland-based DVU recently assisted a vulnerable culturally and linguistically diverse woman on a temporary visa with five children under the age of 18, one of whom had severe disabilities. The client had separated from her partner due to ongoing domestic violence directed at her and her eldest daughter and son. The client was ineligible to receive the majority of Centrelink benefit payments due to her visa status and she and her five children were surviving on a special benefit of approximately \$250 a week. The client's ex-partner, who had left the family home, was continuing to commit acts of domestic violence against her, including by inflicting death threats and financial and emotional abuse, and by intimidating and manipulating her. At the same time, the client was struggling financially, and was unable to afford to pay rent or buy groceries for her family.

Given the diverse nature of her needs, a DVU social worker set up and convened regular case collaboration meetings between five other support services and the client to work on her tenancy/housing, immigration, health, financial, domestic violence and parenting issues. Collectively, the DVU and these services addressed each of the client's needs, including working creatively with community housing providers in order to provide a stable long term housing solution for the family, working with an immigration lawyer to fast-track the permanent residency process for the family, liaising with a real estate agent to ensure the client was not blacklisted or required to pay rental arrears, completing extensive safety planning, and drafting a domestic violence order application. As the client had no funds to pay for removalists to leave the family home, and was ineligible for any support through the Department of Housing, the DVU leveraged its support network and secured over \$2000 worth of donations for the family to help pay for costs associated with moving and setting up her new home. The DVU's social worker liaised with a wide range of stakeholders to obtain emergency funds and food vouchers while the client and her children waited to be granted permanent residency. The client stated that without the DVU's support, and with no family connections in Australia, she would have had no choice but to return to her former partner.