

GOING HOME STAYING HOME?

# HERE IS THE REALITY

This year, the NSW government launched a new model for funding homelessness and crisis refuges. The new model has led to the closure and drastic restructure of scores of women's services. At a time when domestic violence has been increasing in NSW, there will be less adequate places for women seeking refuge, plus chaos and uncertainty through the sector.

Rather than telling the truth, the NSW government is attacking its critics by claiming they are misleading the public. Don't believe NSW government lies.

## HERE ARE THE FACTS

**MYTH: Funding for specialist homelessness services has been increased by \$13 million; a 9.6% increase.**

**FACT** Funding for specialist homelessness services has not been increased. The government has taken money out of specialist services and granted funding to generalist services.

This means that rather than a service catering specifically to women, children, the Aboriginal community, migrant women, youth, the LGBTIQ community, and their particular needs, money has gone to generalist service providers that lack experience and specialist knowledge working with these groups.

**MYTH: More people will have access to homelessness services under these reforms.**

**FACT** Access is more than simply a numbers game. Access also involves services appropriate to need. Aside from the fact that outright closures of refuges are taking place (meaning less beds), transfer to Christian management and to a generalist model means that many people will recognise that these services can not meet their needs and simply won't access them. Many women escaping domestic violence will simply not access a crisis service that houses men. Evidence has shown that women and kids escaping domestic violence need a specialised service not a homelessness service.

Early reports from workers in the sector suggest that fewer staff in services are being asked to carry a far heavier caseload. This does not sit well with a system purportedly set up to improve case management and suggests an emphasis on quantity over quality.

**MYTH: Every single one of the 1,300 Government-owned properties will remain open.**

**FACT** Any service that goes from being independently run and specialist, to Christian run and/or generalist is a closure.

While the government-owned properties will technically remain open, 75% are being handed over to consortiums led by the Salvation Army, Uniting Care, Mission Australia, St Vincent de Paul, and other Christian organisations. All are under pressure to fit a generalist model. The same building being in use doesn't equate to the same service. For example some will change from a 24/7 service to a more minimal staffing level; and 81 pre-existing community organisations have lost their funding or have changed. These organisations had strong links in their local communities which have been lost.

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**MYTH: GSH contracts state that the new service providers must use their best endeavours to maximise the redeployment of staff from existing services**

**FACT** Scores of workers in the sector have already lost their jobs or are set to over the next few months as the transitions in management take place. Women with decades of experience and the skills necessary to cater to women seeking refuge are being fired for no good reason. These workers are likely to be offered redeployment in organisations where the service provision, operating frameworks and organisational ethics are fundamentally different to that of their chosen workplace. Staff numbers are also dwindling as workers leave the sector to find more secure work, not knowing if their workplace is even going to exist a few weeks or months into the future.

**MYTH: FACS consulted widely with the specialist homelessness sector over a 2 year period.**

**FACT** No genuine consultation took place, and what did lacked transparency. Advice was ignored and questions unanswered. The tender process excluded highly specialised care models. Workers in the sector, including management and some members of Domestic Violence NSW (DV NSW), have stated that they were not consulted at all during the initial prequalifying stages or during the tendering process, which was structured in a way that disadvantaged and even excluded smaller specialist providers.

**MYTH: The Going Home Staying Home contracts state that providers need to deliver a secular service without pushing religion.**

**FACT** Christian organisations may agree to provide a secular service. However who they employ and what they deliver is framed by their organisation's mission and culture. At the very least staff are required to adhere to organisations' Christian mission statements. At worst, staff can be expected to assist with pastoral guidance as part of their job. This may limit what staff can advocate. Women who need assistance with divorce, abortion, sexual health or in their employment as sex workers cannot rely on non-judgemental support by people operating within such a framework. Churches have a shocking track record when it comes to working with children, the Aboriginal community, LGBTIQ communities and culturally or religiously diverse people. Tax payer funded welfare should be secular not church based. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse shows that churches have a serious challenge in providing services to women and children.

to find out more about the **FACTS** ...

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