



## THE NSW GOVERNMENT'S GOING HOME STAYING HOME REFORMS – ONE YEAR ON

**Since the Going Home Staying Home reforms were introduced in June 2014, there has been a huge loss of specialist refuges in NSW. As FACS' own website states, there are now only 28 women-only refuges in NSW with only 18 operated by women's organisations. There used to be more than 70.**

**Many refuges have become generalist services - mixing homeless and substance dependent women or those with mental health issues with women and children escaping domestic violence. Many are now not providing the specialised and effective care they once did.**

Of the women's organisations that survived the reforms, many have merged, been forced to reduce staff and are no longer 24/7.

At a time when domestic violence is on the national agenda like never before - it's simply not good enough.

### Key problems

- The Government's reforms have encouraged the mixing of client groups, meaning many refuges now take in homeless women with women and children with specific needs, eg. escaping domestic violence. As a result, many refuges are full and there are concerns about safety and compromised quality of care
- Because services are at capacity, there has been an over-reliance on referring vulnerable women and children to caravan parks and motels instead of the specialist care provided by refuges
- Women accessing the Link2Home service are being given poor information and are required to answer a lengthy questionnaire
- Some refuges have a three day turnaround for taking women in, leaving them in unsafe situations
- The loss of 24/7 on-site or on-call access to refuges
- Local Department of Family and Community Services staff are failing to address serious concerns repeatedly being raised by services and staff are afraid to speak out because they think they will lose their jobs/funding if they complain
- Inexperienced and lack of on-site staff at refuges operated by major charities and poor communication with other services.

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## What SOS has achieved:

- Prevented the closure of five specialist refuges for women and girls in the inner city through negotiations with the Government
- Highlighted problems which saw the return of more than \$8 million in funding to inner city women's services
- Held a forum at NSW Parliament which was attended by more than 80 people including Government Ministers
- Organised a state-wide petition which saw 15,500 signatures presented to Parliament triggering debate on the issue in the House of Representatives
- Provided strong advocacy leading to the establishment of the Service Support Fund which saved a further 16 women's services from closure
- Successfully lobbied the Government for the extension of the Service Support Fund for an additional 18 months to Cooma, Campbelltown, Marrickville, Port Stephens and Rockdale which was extended to all temporary services - \$8.6 million.

## What needs to happen:

### **We believe women's services should remain specialist and the Government should ensure adequate pathways to affordable housing:**

- Five new refuges run by women's organisations in Forster, Hawkesbury, Nowra, Goulburn and Sydney's inner city/inner east
- Women and children escaping domestic violence should not be mixed with general homelessness clients except in exceptional circumstances
- Existing specialist refuges for women with special needs (mental health, substance dependency and leaving custody) to remain specialist and not be mixed with general homeless clients
- All government-owned refuges should be funded to have a mandatory staff member on site or on call 24/7 to ensure after-hours access
- Expansion of girls-only youth refuges catering to 13-17 year old girls and young women
- Contracts for the existing women's services extended to five years instead of three
- A moratorium on the new tenders until 2020 to allow services to rebuild unless there is a critical problem
- Transparency and consistency on administration fees now being charged by some lead agencies which has reduced vital front line service delivery
- Services that advocate for their clients not to be silenced or penalised by the department
- No competitive tendering for community services in future.



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