



**Women's Domestic Violence
Court Advocacy Service NSW Inc**

Media Statement

22 March 2019

for Immediate Release

Media Release – Want women's vote? Think safety – justice – wellbeing

Today, as political candidates across NSW made their final pledges before the public go to the polls, women's safety services – called WDVCSs – supported around 530 women and 460 accompanying children impacted by domestic and family violence.

These women and their children came from all walks of life in a variety of cultural and socio-economic circumstances, and yet commonly experienced a number of violent and abusive behaviours perpetrated upon them – including physical, emotional, verbal, psychological, sexual, financial and/or cultural abuse. In most cases the threat is from their very own partner or ex-partner, or in the case of children, their father.

After the police are called to a violent incident in NSW, WDVCSs are automatically contacted to offer women information, support, resources, safety planning, court advocacy and referrals to legal and other support services for themselves and their children. They also coordinate an integrated model of safety planning with key frontline agencies for women and children assessed at being at serious threat of death or injury.

This model – called [Safer Pathway](#) – has just been independently [evaluated](#) and found to be *'delivering a consistent, effective and timely response to victims of domestic violence across NSW.'* And importantly, for the women and their children accessing the service, the support provided by WDVCS workers has been described as *"compassionate, non-judgmental and trauma-informed."*

WDVCAS NSW Director, Hayley Foster, is concerned, however, that WDVCS workers are being asked to do more with less to support them in their essential, sometimes life-saving work. *"The reality is, funding has not matched the workload and we've seen this with just a 25% increase in funding to support the implementation of the reforms over these past four years whilst client numbers have doubled in this same period."*

The peak body has just undertaken a survey of all the WDVCS workers across NSW, in part to ask them what they see as their key challenges and the remaining service gaps for women and their children escaping domestic and family violence. Foster is not surprised by the results. *"What we're hearing over and over again, is that our specialist women's safety workers are feeling increasingly hammered by the workload, and at the same time extremely frustrated that they do not have the staffing numbers to offer women and children the wraparound services they need to achieve safety, justice and wellbeing."*

Foster notes the strong rhetoric accompanying both the NSW and Federal elections around addressing the 'scourge' of domestic violence and making the issue a 'top priority' but suggests the dollar figures



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being attached to these commitments are relatively modest when one looks at the impact of domestic and family violence on women and children in NSW. *“With 33 women killed, 29,000 assaults recorded, and 46,000 women (and 40,130 accompanying children) supported by WDVCS in NSW last year, it’s not hard to see that this is a mainstream issue affecting a significant proportion of our population,”* says Foster

So, what about the women’s vote? Foster suggests that [women and children’s safety](#) has become a very real concern for the community and that voters are now expecting governments to play a key role. *“There’s a definite change in the winds. The community want to see substantive action to end violence against women and children and they’re increasingly prepared to stand up and make a point about it.”*

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