

Domestic Violence Submission

Domestic violence support is a serious issue in Melbourne's inner west. In recent years we have seen a growing number of Intervention Order Applications in courts in the west suggesting an urgent need for greater crisis support.

The increased population growth in Melbourne's west has not been adequately addressed with additional crisis centres. There is currently a severe lack of refuges in the west where support can be provided swiftly. More refuges are needed along with a reassessment of how refuges are used and provide support.

Cultural Sensitivity

Melbourne's west is increasingly multicultural and is home to many new Australian migrants. This means there needs to be culturally sensitive support for victims prior to seeking an intervention order, and once the intervention order is given, the victim needs to be supported to feel safe. Domestic violence is often underreported in some cultural communities due to a misunderstanding of what constitutes domestic violence along with fear of retribution or isolation in their community.

Providing greater refuge housing and appropriate crisis support is vital to building confidence in the system so victims know if they take out an Intervention Order they can feel safe. Culturally sensitive work also needs to be done with perpetrators of domestic violence. Where men are willing to seek help for their behaviour, they need to be able to quickly and efficiently access support programs. For those perpetrators who haven't accepted they need to change their behaviour there needs to be more intensive and longer term programs available.

Crisis and Ongoing Support

Short, medium, and long-term support are all required to ensure the victim has access to adequate housing, is close to their place of work, close to education facilities (if required), and close to public transport. This is crucial, particularly where victims have young children, to ensure they can maintain a normal life and aren't disadvantaged by seeking help. Financial and emotional support are also required so victims can feel safe and independent. Lack of adequate support unfortunately means many women stay in abusive situations rather than seek help which they see as potentially disruptive to themselves or to their children's lives.

Long term support should include greater affordable housing options and courses aimed at preparing victims to return to work by building their confidence, teaching them skills, and helping to find them jobs.

Prevention

There is a need for culturally sensitive domestic violence prevention programs in Melbourne's west. Programs aimed at a long-term change in perceptions about gender, which can lead to domestic violence, need to be undertaken with children as well as adults. This particularly needs to be addressed in cultures which traditionally view males as superior to females.

Collaboration

To ensure there are no gaps in the system, there needs to be collaborative support from all agencies that may be put in place. Where there is risk of domestic violence there should be early intervention options, along with programs to deal with domestic violence when it does occur in all its forms. We need to see more shared coordination of support for victims. Once they have made initial contact, the services should be aligned and brought to the victim to meet their individual needs.

Conclusion

Access to crisis support needs to be improved in a number of areas to adequately address the issue of domestic violence in Melbourne's west. For newer migrants, many of whom live in the West, cultural sensitivity is necessary so victims can be made to feel safe when seeking help and perpetrators can be appropriately advised on how to change their behaviour.