

# It Stops Here: Safer Pathway Overview



NSW Department of Justice

Justice Precinct Offices  
Level 5, 160 Marsden Street  
Parramatta NSW 2150

Locked Bag 5111  
Parramatta NSW 2124

DX 1227 Sydney  
Tel: 02 8688 7777  
Fax: 02 8688 7980  
Email: [cpd\\_unit@agd.nsw.gov.au](mailto:cpd_unit@agd.nsw.gov.au)

ISBN 978-1-922257-08-6

---

© State of New South Wales through Department of Justice, September 2014. This work may be freely reproduced for personal, educational and government purposes. Permission must be received from the Department for all other uses.

Alternative formats of this information are available.

This document has been prepared by Department of Justice for general information purposes. While every care has been taken in relation to its accuracy, no warranty is given or implied. Further, recipients should obtain their own independent advice before making any decisions that rely on this information.

# Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Executive Summary	2
Suite of documents	3
1. Implementation of Safer Pathway	4
1.1 Transition arrangements until full implementation	5
2. Background	6
2.1 Context	6
2.2 The need for reform	7
2.3 The way forward	8
3. The NSW Government Domestic and Family Violence Reforms	9
3.1 Definition of domestic and family violence	9
3.1.1 Common definition of domestic and family violence	9
3.2 The Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform	10
3.3 Elements of the Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform	11
3.3.1 Element 1: A strategic approach to prevention and early intervention	11
3.3.2 Element 3: Accessible, flexible, person-centred service responses	11
3.3.3 Element 4: A strong, skilled workforce	12
3.3.4 Element 5: The NSW Domestic Violence Justice Strategy	12
4. Element 2: Safer Pathway	14
4.1 Key Components of Safer Pathway	14
4.1.1 Integration with child protection response	15
4.1.2 Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool	15
4.1.3 Central Referral Point	17
4.1.4 Local Coordination Points	17
4.1.5 Safety Action Meetings	17
4.1.6 Information sharing legislation	18
5. Governance	19
5.1 Ministerial Oversight	19
5.2 Domestic and Family Violence Council	19
5.3 The Domestic and Family Violence Reforms Delivery Board	19
5.4 Regional Governance	19

# Acknowledgements

The introduction of *It Stops Here: Safer Pathway* (Safer Pathway) reflects a shared commitment to improving the response to domestic and family violence through collaborative, integrated service provision and improved information sharing.

Safer Pathway is the result of consultations with individuals, victims of domestic violence, service providers and agencies across the state. It was informed by experts with experience working with victims and perpetrators of violence and, to improve the response to domestic and family violence, has considered strategies that have worked in other Australian states and internationally.

This Overview was developed by the Department of Justice in collaboration with key government agencies, including Legal Aid NSW, NSW Police Force and Women NSW.

The Department extends its thanks to these partner agencies and the other members of the Domestic and Family Violence Reforms Delivery Board, including the Department of Family and Community Services, the Department of Education and Communities, NSW Health, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The NSW Government gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the Office for Women, South Australia for providing advice and support in the development of Safer Pathway.

# Executive Summary

*It Stops Here: Safer Pathway* (Safer Pathway) and accompanying Information Sharing Protocol and other resources were developed as part of the NSW Government's Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform (DFV Reforms). The DFV Reforms aim to improve the Government's response to domestic and family violence in NSW and are outlined in *It Stops Here: Standing Together to End Domestic and Family Violence in NSW*.

The DFV Reforms set a new strategic direction for addressing domestic and family violence in NSW by strengthening the approach to domestic and family violence prevention, improving the response to domestic and family violence, changing the way service providers deliver services to victims, and delivering programs and services that hold perpetrators accountable and reduce re-offending.

At the heart of the DFV Reforms is the safety and protection of victims. Through Safer Pathway, services are swiftly and efficiently wrapped around the victim in a coordinated way. Service providers are able to use a new assessment tool specifically designed to assess domestic violence threats. Streamlined referral pathways and increased information sharing between service providers improve victims' safety, facilitating their access to domestic violence support services, promoting earlier intervention and reducing their stress and trauma. Victims at serious threat are referred to Safety Action Meetings where agencies collaboratively consider what can be done to protect victims from death, disability or injury as a result of domestic violence.

The Overview provides the context to the development of the NSW Government's domestic and family violence framework for reform and gives a summary of the critical findings and recommendations of three parliamentary inquiries that made it clear the NSW Government had to change the way it responded to domestic and family violence. The Overview also includes the common definition of domestic and family violence.

It introduces the broader DFV Reforms and provides the context to the development of the five priority elements that underpin the reforms, and how they will be achieved through an integrated whole-of-community approach.

The chapter on Safer Pathway provides the context surrounding the development of Element 2 of the DFV Reforms and a summary of the key components, including the Central Referral Point, Local Coordination Points, Safety Action Meetings and information sharing legislation. This chapter also describes how the key components facilitate victims' access to support services.

The final chapter outlines governance arrangements to support the successful development and implementation of the broader DFV Reforms. It also provides information on the regional governance arrangements being developed as an important part of ensuring that Safer Pathway and all aspects of the broader DFV Reforms are implemented effectively and deliver the expected outcomes for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

# Suite of documents

Safer Pathway Overview (Overview) is the first part of a suite of five reference documents to support the implementation and operation of Safer Pathway. These five documents provide a framework for a common understanding of Safer Pathway and equip service providers with the information and the tools required to support the implementation of the new framework and to deliver a consistent and integrated response to domestic and family violence across NSW.

Service providers are encouraged to read the Overview in conjunction with the other common documents, which include:

## [Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol \(Protocol\)](#)

Explains information sharing under Part 13A of the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*. It sets out the procedures for service providers to share information, including consent and referral practices, and outlines their information management obligations. It also outlines procedures for access and amendment of information, the management of complaints, and the compliance framework.

## [Safety Action Meeting Manual \(SAM Manual\)](#)

A guide for Safety Action Meeting members; it outlines the purpose and operations of Safety Action Meetings as a key element of Safer Pathway, the roles and responsibilities of members and the development of Safety Action Plans.

## [Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool Guide \(DVSAT Guide\)](#)

Includes the common assessment tool and assists service providers apply the tool with victims of domestic violence and using professional judgement to assess threats to domestic violence victims.

## [Domestic Violence and Child Protection Intersection Guidelines \(DV&CP Guidelines\)](#)

Clarifies the intersection between the domestic violence and the child protection systems in the context of information sharing and coordinated service delivery.

# 1. Implementation of Safer Pathway

Tackling domestic and family violence is a serious and complex issue that requires coordinated and careful consideration of service design and a robust change management process. Because Safer Pathway proposes a fundamental change to the response to domestic and family violence in NSW, implementation must be carefully monitored to ensure the new model achieves intended objectives and positive outcomes for victims.

Safer Pathway introduces a number of new components: the Central Referral Point, Local Coordination Points, a threat assessment tool and Safety Action Meetings. It is important to ensure that implementation of the changes make the best possible use of resources – both financial and human and that ongoing consultation and a robust evaluation process informs further roll out of Safer Pathway across NSW.

A phased approach has been taken to implement Safer Pathway, initially starting with two launch sites that commenced operations in September 2014. The launch sites will operate for nine months, with further sites commencing mid-2015 and full implementation across 28 sites in NSW over five years and completed in 2019. The phased implementation will allow the new model to be tested and improved if necessary before implementing more broadly. It also allows continued engagement with local service providers and other key stakeholders state-wide.

Safer Pathway was launched in Orange and Waverley on 15 September 2014 and these sites were selected because they offer an opportunity to test the new approach under different circumstances, in a metropolitan and a regional setting, with different service systems in place, levels of demand, and diverse populations.

The process for determining the next sites for Safer Pathway considers criteria including demographic, geographic and needs data, the prevalence of domestic and family violence in the area, service capacity issues, and the relationships agencies, services and community stakeholders. It is expected that the next set of sites for rollout will also have a diverse mix of metropolitan and regional/rural sites whilst also being representative of different levels of domestic violence incidence and needs of particular communities.

Two agencies are taking the lead in overseeing the implementation of the DFV Reforms and are working closely to coordinate the delivery of all aspects of the reforms. Women NSW within the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, has overall responsibility for leading the reform program, including prevention and early intervention, access to services, perpetrator programs, education and training and reform evaluation.

The Department of Justice is leading the implementation of the delivery of Safer Pathway and will be responsible for the implementation of the service model and delivery platform.

Effective monitoring, reporting and evaluation is a significant factor in the success of Safer Pathway and the broader reforms. A comprehensive evaluation strategy will be developed and will inform the next stage of implementation for effective roll out of the new threat based management and referral arrangements across the state.

## 1.1 Transition arrangements until full implementation

Part 13A and the Protocol commenced on 15 September 2014 to support Safer Pathway in the launch sites at Waverley and Orange. As Safer Pathway will be rolled out across NSW in a staged approach over five years, elements of Safer Pathway, such as the Central Referral Point, Local Coordination Points and Safety Actions Meetings, referred to in the DFV Reforms and the Protocol, are not available state-wide until such time as new sites have been announced and transitioned.

This means that while Part 13A and the Protocol apply from 15 September, the other elements do not, outside of Waverley and Orange.

Part 13A and the Protocol now apply in NSW and service providers should now adopt the provisions of the new legislation and share information about victims and perpetrators in accordance with the Protocol and where there is a legal basis to do so. Where service providers outside of the launch sites make referrals for victims and share information under the Protocol, they may use existing referral pathways and domestic violence support systems.



## 2. Background

Safer Pathway was developed as a whole-of-government response designed to provide accessible and effective domestic violence support services to victims, with a focus on victims at serious threat. Under Safer Pathway, policing, justice, health, education, child protection and victim service agencies work in an integrated manner to reduce threats to adult and children victims of domestic violence. This is to ensure that a seamless response can meet the individual needs of victims and children, and service providers jointly manage threats of further violence.

### 2.1 Context

Domestic and family violence includes behaviours that control or dominate a person causing them to fear for their own or someone else's safety. People experience domestic and family violence across all age groups, economic levels, ethnic backgrounds and across all kinds of relationships. Domestic violence is about power and control and, although men can also experience domestic violence, it is primarily perpetrated by men against women. Experiencing fear and violence at the hands of a partner or family member can have devastating effects on an individual's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Domestic and family violence has unacceptably high social, health and financial costs for victims and NSW society:

- Around 125,000 incidents are reported to the NSW Police Force each year, and another 300,000 additional incidents are estimated to go unreported in the same period.<sup>1</sup>
- Domestic violence is mostly perpetrated by males (70 per cent) regardless of the gender of the victim.
- Aboriginal women are six times more likely to be victims of domestic and family violence than non-Aboriginal women, and 31 times more likely to be hospitalised for family violence related assault than other Australian women and men.<sup>2</sup>
- Women and girls with disabilities are 37.3 per cent more likely than women and girls without disabilities to experience some form of intimate partner violence.<sup>3</sup>
- Figures for the last 10-year average to 2011 show a stable trend or slight increase in offences associated with domestic violence.<sup>4</sup>
- Domestic violence is the single greatest cause of death, ill health and disability for women aged under 45.<sup>5</sup>

---

1 NSW Auditor General's Report Responding to domestic and family violence, 2011.

2 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011

3 People With Disability Australia (2013) National Symposium on Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities, Background paper

4 BOCSAR, Domestic Violence key facts and findings 2012

5 BOCSAR, Female victims of domestic violence homicide October 2012 to September 2013

- Approximately three quarters of female homicides are classified as domestic homicides, involving victims who share a family or domestic relationship with the offender. In 2012/2013 in NSW, there were 39 domestic violence homicides; 24 of the deceased were female.<sup>6</sup>
- Children who witness domestic violence in the home experience emotional trauma and are more likely to experience or use violence in their own relationships.
- The estimated cost of domestic violence to the NSW economy is more than \$4.5 billion annually.<sup>7</sup>

This represents unacceptable social, health and financial costs for the individual victims and the Australian society as a whole. Yet most domestic and family violence deaths or serious injury or disability are preventable.

## 2.2 The need for reform

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need to improve domestic violence prevention and response, and improve interagency collaboration. Several key reports identified the need for significant, system-wide reform of the NSW domestic violence response system.

In 2010, the Australian and NSW Law Reform Commissions released a joint report *Family Violence - A National Legal Response*. The Commissions were asked to consider what, if any, improvements could be made to legal frameworks to protect the safety of women and their children. The final report contained 187 recommendations focused on improving legal frameworks and improving practice, with the overarching principle being the development of a seamless response system. These included changes to legal frameworks to ensure: a better and shared understanding of the meaning, nature and dynamics of family violence; improved quality and use of evidence; improved education and training on domestic violence; the development of more integrated responses; improved information sharing between government and non-government; and better coordination overall so that the practice in responding to family violence would be less fragmented.

In 2011, the NSW Auditor General released a report *Responding to domestic and family violence*. The report was critical of the current domestic violence response, particularly that there was no system for agencies to work together across the state in response to domestic violence, there was no common approach to identify risk and there was a lack of leadership to drive change to the system. The report suggested that, as a result of such factors, while police and courts enforced laws vigorously, the amount of domestic violence reporting remained stable and most violence was not reported to police.

The report recognised the need for a comprehensive and long term commitment to address and prevent domestic violence with a more responsive and coordinated system that encouraged people to seek help and provided them with support when they did so, involving both government agencies and non-government organisations.

In 2012, the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues released a report *Domestic violence trends and issues in NSW*. The report found that the government's response to domestic violence was fragmented, complex and inconsistent; that victims faced different service standards and complex service pathways, and that the system focused overly on criminal justice interventions at the expense of victim support. In particular, the report identified service shortages across a number of areas that compromised the safety of victim safety. The report also found that organisations did not assess risk in a consistent manner and that there was no system to prioritise victims at serious threat.

<sup>6</sup> BOCSAR, Female victims of domestic violence homicide October 2012 to September 2013

<sup>7</sup> NSW Auditor-General's Report 2011

In order to improve the experience and outcomes for victims of domestic violence, reduce the incidence and devastation to families caused by domestic violence and hold perpetrators accountable, these inquiries recommended a reform of the government's response to domestic violence, the development of an integrated domestic violence intervention system, ongoing and responsive collaboration between the government and non-government sector, and legislative amendments to improve information sharing between agencies.

## 2.3 The way forward

As the inquiries revealed, domestic violence is a multi-faceted issue that requires a coordinated response from service providers in the areas of health, welfare, child protection, policing, justice, and victim support services. Service providers from across government and non-government must work in partnership to:

- prevent domestic violence related deaths, illness, injury and disability,
- identify and manage domestic violence threats by using a common threat assessment tool where possible and sharing information about the safety of victims and the behaviour of perpetrators,
- make referrals for victims to secure their immediate safety, assist them in any legal processes, and enable their recovery from the trauma associated with the violence,
- respond to the identified needs of victims and their children as a consequence of domestic violence or that make them more vulnerable to its impacts,
- increase the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children who are victims or exposed to domestic violence, and
- hold perpetrators accountable by reporting domestic violence incidents and alerting relevant agencies if there is evidence of an escalating threat of violence.

To achieve this, the NSW Government developed *It Stops Here: Standing Together to End Domestic and Family Violence in NSW*, the domestic and family violence framework for reform, which was launched in February 2014.

## 3. The NSW Government Domestic and Family Violence Reforms

The NSW Government set a priority to develop and implement a new policy direction to address domestic and family violence with the launch of the Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform (DFV Reforms).

The DFV Reforms were informed by many people, services and resources, including existing evidence, agency experience, representatives from a range of communities, including Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities and, importantly, the views of victims who experienced domestic violence.

This chapter documents the elements that comprise the DFV Reforms as the policy vehicle through which the government delivers an integrated and coordinated response for victims of domestic violence.

### 3.1 Definition of domestic and family violence

A recommendation of the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues was to develop a common definition of domestic and family violence that could be adopted by all agencies. At the time of the inquiry, there were 17 different definitions across agencies in NSW. As a consequence, victims were receiving inconsistent responses and, at times, were not able to access services because they did not fit a particular agency's definition.

The common policy definition is the result of consultation between government agencies and community organisations and acknowledges that domestic violence is predominantly perpetrated by men against women, but is inclusive of victims and perpetrators of both genders; that the behaviours that constitute domestic violence are violations of human rights; and that some are crimes.

A policy definition of domestic violence gives victims, perpetrators and service providers a shared understanding of the behaviours that comprise domestic violence and the context in which the behaviours take place. It also sets common goals and a clear framework for the provision of services to facilitate a consistent service system response.

#### 3.1.1 Common definition of domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence includes any behaviour in a domestic relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling and causing a person to fear for their own or someone else's safety. It is usually manifested as part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.

The behaviours that may constitute domestic and family violence include:

- physical violence including physical assault or abuse
- sexual assault and other sexually abusive or coercive behaviour
- emotional or psychological abuse including verbal abuse and threats of violence
- economic abuse, for example denying a person reasonable financial autonomy or financial support
- stalking, for example harassment, intimidation or coercion of the other person's family in order to cause fear or ongoing harassment, including through the use of electronic communication or social media

- kidnapping or deprivation of liberty, as well as unreasonably preventing the other person from making or keeping connections with her or his family or kin, friends, faith or culture
- damage to property irrespective of whether the victim owns the property
- causing injury or death to an animal irrespective of whether the victim owns the animal.

Domestic relationships include intimate partner relationships and family relationships.

An intimate relationship refers to people who are (or have been) in an intimate partnership whether or not the relationship involves or has involved a sexual relationship, for example, married or engaged to be married, separated, divorced, defacto partners (whether of the same or different sex), couples promised to each other under cultural or religious tradition, or who are dating.

A family relationship has a broader definition and includes people who are related to one another through blood, marriage or defacto partnerships, adoption and fostering relationships, sibling and extended family relationships. It includes the full range of kinship ties in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, extended family relationships, and constructs of family within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer communities. People living in the same house, people living in the same residential care facility and people reliant on care may also be considered to be in a domestic relationship if their relationships exhibit family like dynamics.

## 3.2 The Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform

The DFV Reforms outlined in *It Stops Here: Standing Together to End Domestic and Family Violence in NSW* are a whole-of-government initiative focused on providing a consistent response to people experiencing domestic and family violence, regardless of whether they have contact with the justice system. The DFV Reforms deliver strategies that put the victim at the centre of the system so they can access the services and support they need to be safe and to recover from violence.

The DFV Reforms aim to secure the safety of victims and their children by strengthening the approach to violence prevention, changing the way services are delivered and support is provided to victims, and delivering programs and services that hold perpetrators accountable and reduce re-offending.

The overall outcomes of the DFV Reforms are that:

- Domestic and family violence is prevented.
- Domestic and family violence is identified early.
- Victims are safe and supported to recover.
- Perpetrators stop using violence.
- A supported, professional and effective service sector is developed.

The underlying causes of domestic and family violence are complex, and to prevent and reduce the violence will take time and investment across the intervention spectrum. For this reason, the outcomes of the DFV Reforms are being achieved through five priority elements:

Element 1: A strategic approach to prevention and early intervention

Element 2: Streamlined referral pathways to secure victims' safety and recovery

Element 3: Accessible, flexible, person-centre service responses that make the best use of resources

Element 4: A strong, skilled and capable workforce.

Element 5: A strengthened criminal justice system response

The cornerstone of the DFV Reforms is Safer Pathway which addresses Element 2 and proposes a fundamental change in how agencies and organisations work to address domestic and family violence in NSW.

Before considering Safer Pathway in detail in the next chapter, the following sections provide a short description of the other elements of the DFV Reforms. For more detailed information on Elements 1, 3 and 4, refer to *It Stops Here Standing Together to End Domestic and Family Violence in NSW*.

The DFV Reforms represent the beginning of a new way of addressing domestic and family violence in NSW. They are being implemented in a staged approach, and will be monitored and evaluated over time to ensure they are effective and relevant.

## 3.3 Elements of the Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform

### 3.3.1 Element 1: A strategic approach to prevention and early intervention

The underlying causes of domestic and family violence are complex. To a large extent, they reflect deeply held views in society about gender, masculinity, power, and relationships. In order to combat domestic and family violence we need to better understand these complexities.

Element 1 focuses on developing a stronger, more evidence-based approach to prevention that recognises that domestic and family violence is a community problem that requires a community response. Breaking the cycle of violence requires strategic and coordinated actions from all levels of government as well as from others including individuals, families, workplaces, sporting clubs, community networks and organisations.

A priority of the DFV Reforms is to see targeted prevention work undertaken in the community. As a first stage, we have commissioned three studies to examine current approaches to violence prevention in NSW, and consider methods used interstate and overseas.

Following on from research, new approaches to violence prevention will be examined. This will include consideration of how the NSW Government can work with non-government, private and philanthropic organisations to create a response to domestic and family violence.

A focus on perpetrator accountability resulted in the establishment of a state-wide Men's Telephone Counselling and Referral Service in November 2013. It provides telephone counselling for men outside the criminal justice system who have committed or are at risk of committing domestic and family violence and who want to change their behaviour. Programs to address men's behaviour change are also offered by a range of non-government organisations.

### 3.3.2 Element 3: Accessible, flexible, person-centred service responses

Victims of domestic and family violence can require a broad range of supports to help them recover from violence. For example, they may need assistance with their physical and mental health recovery, finances, accommodation, and transport. Interventions that integrate child protection responses and services, assist children and families to receive the support they need.

Element 3 reflects a commitment to improving services to make the best possible use of existing resources and to more effectively implement strategies that meet demand where it is greatest and support planning for future demand.

The NSW Government is expanding Staying Home Leaving Violence, a well-established government program to help women and children escaping violence to stay at home. A further focus of this element is to establish and promote minimum practice standards for the sector to ensure that victims receive a consistent level of response from mainstream and specialist domestic violence support services.

### 3.3.3 Element 4: A strong, skilled workforce

The DFV Reforms can only be successful if we equip frontline workers with the knowledge, skills and support they need to make the changes work. Element 4 acknowledges that the reform agenda depends on a well-equipped workforce to implement the DFV Reforms.

The Domestic and Family Violence Skills Development Strategy will deliver competency-based training to support the needs of non-government sector workers in the context of domestic violence, and state-wide information sessions for workers on the DFV Reforms. For more information on training opportunities and the reform information sessions, refer to the Skills Development Strategy website: <http://swsi.edu.au/dfvstrategy>

### 3.3.4 Element 5: The NSW Domestic Violence Justice Strategy

The NSW Domestic Violence Justice Strategy (Strategy) is an operational framework that outlines the approaches and standards justice agencies in NSW have adopted to improve the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence. Its fundamental objectives are to make victims safer, hold perpetrators accountable and prevent domestic violence from reoccurring.

Agencies involved in the Strategy include the Department of Justice (including the Attorney General's Division and Corrective Services NSW), NSW Police Force, Legal Aid NSW (including the Criminal Law Division and the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program), the Department of Family and Community Services (including Women NSW and Community Services), the Judicial Commission of NSW and the Office of the Chief Magistrate.

These agencies provide a range of services to victims and perpetrators within the criminal justice system in NSW. Through the Strategy, agencies have built a shared commitment to ensuring improved services, greater coordination and a more robust and effective justice process in dealing with domestic violence cases. The Strategy explains what victims and perpetrators should experience from the beginning to the end of the criminal justice process and in on-going management of convicted offenders.

The Strategy clearly defines outcomes for victims and perpetrators.

The six justice outcomes under the Strategy are:

- Victims' safety is secured immediately and the risk of further violence is reduced.
- Victims have confidence in the justice system and are empowered to participate.
- Victims have the support they need.
- The court process for domestic violence matters is efficient, fair and accessible.
- Abusive behaviour is stopped and perpetrators are held to account.
- Perpetrators change their behaviour and re-offending is reduced or eliminated.

The Strategy requires agencies to work together to provide an effective and integrated response supported by strong leadership. The Strategy sets well-defined standards of service which agencies are working towards and aspire to achieve over the term of the strategy from 2013 to 2017. It has an explicit focus on ensuring standards are deliverable to all victims and perpetrators in NSW.

During its development, partner agencies also identified areas where reform is needed to ensure effective implementation of the Strategy. These areas include the need for consistent responses by police and other agencies, improved evidence collection and prosecution practices, and agencies and service providers working together centrally and in each region to support victims and their families.

They also include victims' access to support services, perpetrators' access to behaviour change programs and other programs to reduce re-offending, and targeted strategies to meet the needs of Aboriginal victims and offenders. The Strategy is addressing these key areas through research, and legislative and policy reform throughout its term.

For more information, refer to the *NSW Domestic Violence Justice Strategy: Improving the NSW Criminal Justice System's Response to Domestic Violence 2013-2017*.



## 4. Element 2: Safer Pathway

Safer Pathway involves an integrated and coordinated government and non-government response for victims identified at threat of domestic and family violence, with a particular focus on victims at serious threat. The purpose of Safer Pathway is to intervene at the earliest opportunity to ensure victims have access to support services to secure their safety.

Safer Pathway addresses the high levels of underreporting of domestic violence, by identifying victims and providing an immediate response as soon as a victim reaches out to a service provider. This means that victims will receive a consistent response regardless of how they entered the system or who they come into contact with: they may talk to their GP or housing provider; they may be identified through a routine screening program in the health system; or they may come into contact with the police following an incident, or the justice system when making an application for an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO).

In summary, Safer Pathway seeks to:

- identify victims early and provide an immediate service response
- wrap support services around victims to build safety and reduce the potential for death, disability or injury as a result of domestic violence
- encourage the use of a common threat assessment tool to manage threats consistently
- establish a single, streamlined referral pathway for all victims of domestic violence
- provide a seamless service system response and local case coordination to address domestic violence threats and enable victims' recovery
- address serious threats to the life, health or safety of victims, any children or other persons through a multi-agency response.

It is anticipated that the coordinated and focused approach under Safer Pathway will reduce deaths, disability and injury as a result of domestic violence.

### 4.1 Key Components of Safer Pathway

Safer Pathway is underpinned by a number of key components. These components build on the existing domestic violence service system to implement robust and consistent standards and practices, and strengthen interagency collaboration. Under Safer Pathway, victims are placed at the centre of the system and are provided with more effective and efficient responses, more integrated service support, to help them recover from domestic violence and to prevent the escalation of abuse.

The key components of Safer Pathway are:

- a Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT) to better and consistently identify the level of threat to victims
- a Central Referral Point to electronically manage and monitor referrals
- a state-wide network of Local Coordination Points that facilitate local responses and provide victims with case coordination and support
- Safety Action Meetings in which members develop Safety Action Plans for victims at serious threat

- information sharing legislation that allows service providers to share information about victims and perpetrators so that victims do not have to retell their story multiple times, to hold perpetrators accountable and to promote an integrated response for victims at serious threat.

The Service Delivery Map (see page 16) brings together the key components of Safer Pathway and illustrates how victims are supported in a seamless service system response. Each component of Safer Pathway is explained in the following sections.

#### 4.1.1 Integration with child protection response

Safer Pathway acknowledges that a significant number of victims have children in their care that are victims or are affected by domestic violence in the home. For this reason the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children is implied in all aspects of Safer Pathway and, in conjunction to adult victims, service providers must consider the safety of any children in their responses.

Safer Pathway does not replace child protection practices or processes, but because of the seriousness and prevalence of domestic violence in child protection matters, it emphasises the importance of an integrated service response to ensure threats to the safety of adults and children are managed collaboratively and effectively, and they receive the support they need.

Safer Pathway does not override the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (CYPCP Act)*. Service providers must comply with their child protection obligations under the *CYPCP Act*.

Service providers should refer to the *Domestic Violence and Child Protection Guidelines* for more information on the intersection of Part 13A and the child protection system.

#### 4.1.2 Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool

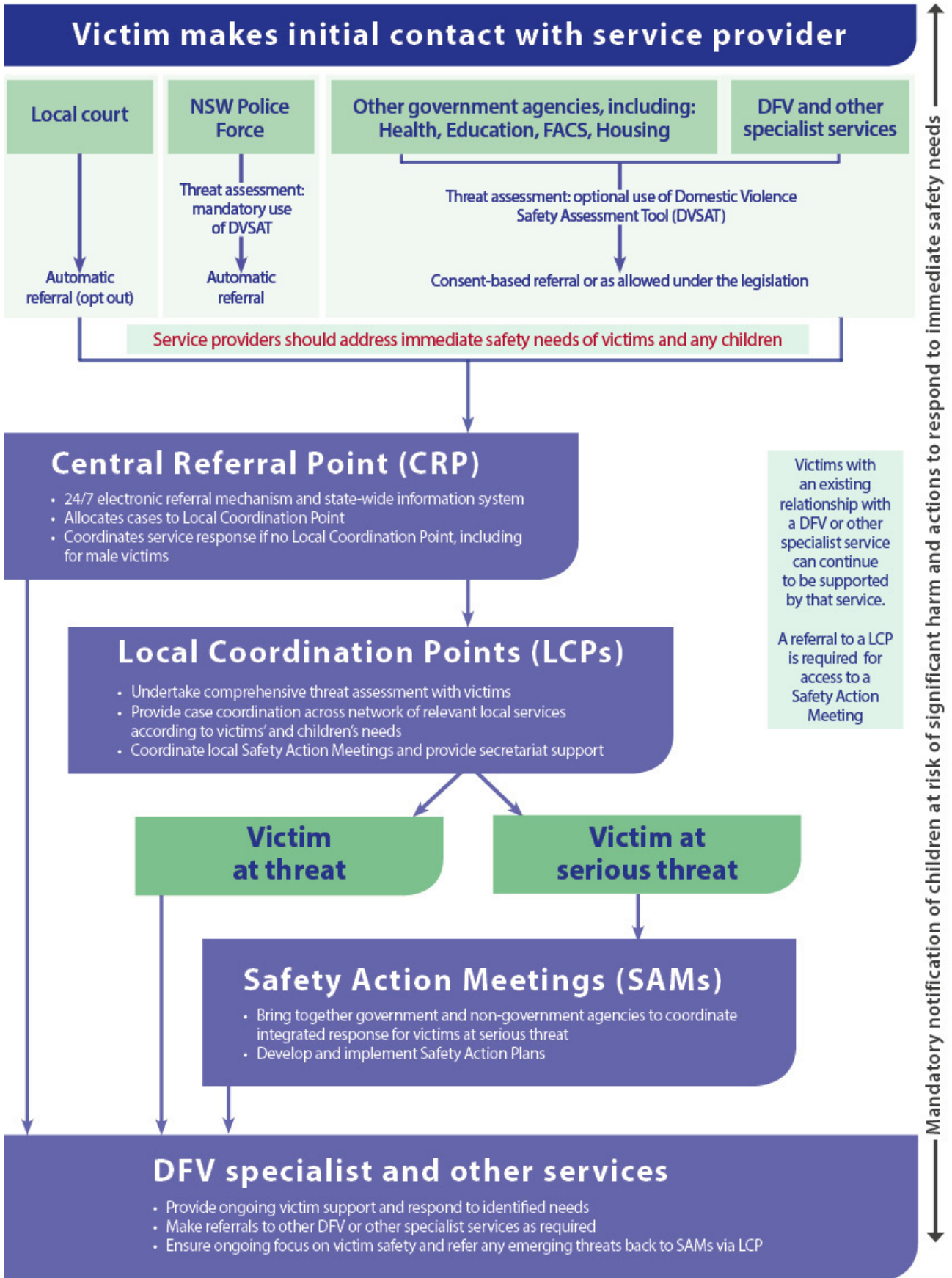
The consistent early identification of victims at threat is a key plank of Safer Pathway. This ensures that, regardless of how victims enter the system, the response is consistent and victims are connected to the most appropriate domestic violence support services as early as possible to meet their individual needs.

The Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT) identifies the level of threat to victims of domestic violence and prioritises victims at serious threat. The DVSAT consists of a series of questions that relate to recurring factors or behaviours recognised as indicators of threat to victims of domestic violence. Based on these indicators, the DVSAT provides a score of the seriousness of the threat to a victim.

The victim's level of threat continues to be assessed and managed throughout the service system response.

As part of this process, risk identification, assessment and management of child victims is also critical and must be considered by service providers. Service providers should refer to the mandatory reporter guide, which is the assessment tool where children have been identified as victims or have witnessed domestic and family violence.

Service providers are encouraged to use the common DVSAT, but it is not mandatory and they can use their own recognised tool or their professional judgement to determine the level of threat to a victim. The NSW Police Force must use the DVSAT for all incidents of intimate partner domestic violence. Refer to the *Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool Guide* for the DVSAT and for further information on how to use the tool.



### 4.1.3 Central Referral Point

Streamlined and efficient referral pathways are an essential component of the response to domestic violence. This ensures that victims are connected to appropriate support in a timely manner without having to negotiate complex service systems on their own or re-tell their story multiple times.

The Central Referral Point is an electronic referral platform administered by Victims Services in the Department of Justice. The Central Referral Point receives referrals from service providers that have identified that a victim is at threat, sorts the referrals and allocates them electronically to a Local Coordination Point on the basis of the victim's gender and location. This process is fully automated.

The Central Referral Point also monitors the responsiveness of the system to victims' needs from referral to case closure. It provides real time de-identified data on domestic violence referrals and the timeliness of services provided to victims.

### 4.1.4 Local Coordination Points

Local Coordination Points are a state-wide network of non-government services that provide local domestic violence safety coordination for victims. The only exception is where a victim is already being case managed by a service and wishes to continue with that service and the service has indicated its capacity to respond. For example, where a person is receiving case coordination or case management services from a Staying Home Leaving Violence program, that relationship will continue as opposed to a new case work relationship being formed with a Local Coordination Point.

In most circumstances, Local Coordination Points receive referrals from the Central Referral Point, but in some cases service providers may make referrals directly to a Local Coordination Point.

Local Coordination Points undertake comprehensive review and assessment of victims' level of threat. They are the point of contact where victims can learn about the services available to them and they make warm referrals to local domestic violence and other specialist services (for example, income support, financial counselling, court support, housing, youth or family support). The Local Coordination Point also acts as a referral point for Safety Action Meetings for victims at serious threat.

The Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS) is hosting the Local Coordination Points across NSW. Victims Services in the Department of Justice act as a Local Coordination Point for some victims who do not wish to work with the Local Coordination Point in their area and for all male victims.

### 4.1.5 Safety Action Meetings

Safety Action Meetings are regular meetings of local service providers that aim to prevent or lessen serious threats to the safety of domestic violence victims and their children through targeted information sharing. The principle behind the Safety Action Meeting is that formalised, cooperative action and information sharing between service providers supports better outcomes for the safety of victims, their children or other persons and closer monitoring of perpetrator behaviour.

Safety Action Meetings bring together representatives from key government and non-government agencies that provide services to victims and perpetrators in the local area.

At a Safety Action Meeting, members share information about victims and perpetrators and develop Safety Action Plans. Safety Action Plans are actions that agencies must take to reduce or prevent serious threats to the life, health or safety of victims, any children or other persons.

The Local Coordination Points provide secretariat support for Safety Action Meetings and coordinate the development and implementation of Safety Action Plans.

For more information on Safety Action Meetings, refer to the *Safety Action Meeting Manual*.



#### 4.1.6 Information sharing legislation

To support Safer Pathway, legislative amendments were made that create exceptions to NSW privacy laws and allow service providers to share information about victims, perpetrators and other persons in defined circumstances. At the heart of improved information sharing is the assumption that no single agency or individual can see the complete picture of the life of a victim, but all may have information or insights that are crucial to their safety.

The legislative amendments are contained in Part 13A of the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* (Part 13A) and enable service providers be more effective in responding to victims of domestic violence, while ensuring the safety of victims and upholding individuals' rights to privacy.

Service providers should refer to the *Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol* for more information on sharing information under Part 13A.

In cases of domestic violence where children are victims or experienced domestic violence in the home, service providers who are prescribed bodies under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* should exchange information under Chapter 16A of that Act. Chapter 16A provides for the exchange of information between prescribed bodies relating to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child, to assist the receiving service provider make any decision, assessment, or plan, or to initiate or conduct any investigations, or provide any service relating to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or to manage any risk to the child. Refer to the *Domestic Violence and Child Protection Guidelines* for more information.

## 5. Governance

A critical element for success is the overall leadership of the DFV Reforms. This means ensuring that an effective and robust governance model is in place.

Established governance arrangements comprise a Ministerial Group, the NSW Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Council and the DFV Reforms Delivery Board. A Violent Domestic Crimes Taskforce and Social Investment Advisory Group, while not directly responsible for the delivery of the DFV Reforms, also supports the NSW Government's approach to addressing domestic and family violence by providing expert advice on particular issues.

### 5.1 Ministerial Oversight

Six Ministers – the Minister for Justice and Attorney General, Ministers for Women, Family and Community Services, Police, Health and Aboriginal Affairs provide oversight of all aspects of the DFV Reforms implementation.

These Ministers provide the top-level leadership and political drive for delivering innovation and integration in the NSW Government's response to domestic and family violence and report to Cabinet.

### 5.2 Domestic and Family Violence Council

The NSW Domestic and Family Violence Council is an expert forum established to provide advice to the NSW Government on all aspects of domestic and family violence policy and program delivery.

The Council comprises 14 members: eight members from non-government organisations and the remaining six members are ex-officio government representatives including Department of Justice, Department of Family and Community Services, NSW Police Force, NSW Health, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Education and Communities, and Aboriginal Affairs.


### 5.3 The Domestic and Family Violence Reforms Delivery Board

The Domestic and Family Violence Reforms Delivery Board (Board) includes senior representatives of government agencies including Department of Justice, Family and Community Services, NSW Police Force, NSW Health, Department of Premier and Cabinet, NSW Treasury and the Department of Education and Communities, including Aboriginal Affairs. The Board is responsible for delivering the whole-of-government response to domestic and family violence. The Board provides advice to the Ministers and the Domestic and Family Violence Council.

Through performance monitoring and evaluation, the Board ensures continuous improvement of the delivery of the reforms.

### 5.4 Regional Governance

The NSW Police Force will lead regional governance in the launch sites for the launch period via a forum of relevant government and non-government organisations, with the support of the Police Regional Domestic Violence Coordinators. This arrangement will be evaluated and subject to refinement as the rollout progresses. It is anticipated that the next tranche of sites will test an alternative model as a comparison to the one being led by NSW Police Force.



The role of this forum will be to resolve operational issues affecting implementation, escalate any systemic issues to the Board should they arise, and ensure that roles and responsibilities at the launch sites are fulfilled.